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ACCENT

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Fat Aaron and
ne Night Rider

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Meaning and Form in
Faulkner's The Hamlet

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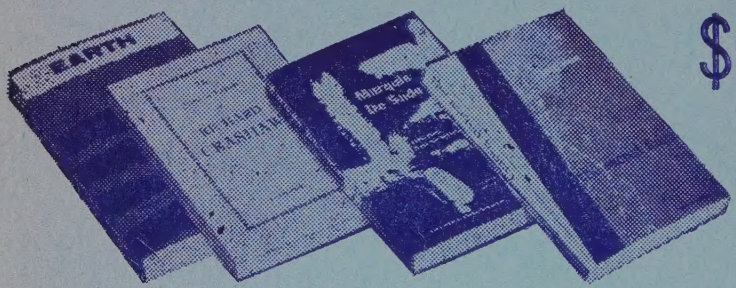

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ACCENT
A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE
Volume XV, Number 2 Spring, 1955

VERNON YOUNG:

"Hardly a Man Is Now Alive": Monologue on a Nazi Film

You hear that the Museum of Modern Art is to show a film of the Olympic Games, made at Berlin in 1936: in two parts, for God's sake!—two afternoon sessions of an hour and forty minutes each! You ask yourself, "What's in this for me, besides the occupational compulsion of the critic to see everything? Three hours and twenty minutes of the Extrovert Ideal? Strictly for mesamorphs!"

Supervising director, Leni Riefensthal. The name rings a cracked bell: a German actress who became a Hitler favorite. Memory prods: called by some a genius, by others an upstart given credit for the achievements of her production staff. She received especially high praise from Robert Flaherty, did she not, in a footnote to an article on film-making? You're not in agreement with the Orthodox who believe in Flaherty as the Holy Ghost of that Trinity which allegedly comprises D. W. Griffith and Eisenstein as well. Still, you look up the reference. (Penguin-Pelican: *The Cinema,* 1950)—"Robert Flaherty Talking":

> Hitler was a very clever fellow. . . . He spared no effort to make films and use them . . . wonderful films made by Leni Riefensthal, but terrifying like her *Triumph of the Will.* Here was a film made in 1934 in which you saw even then that the Nazis were a psychopathic case with whom to reason was impossible. But that film, which because of its revelation could have had a vital influence on subsequent events, was suppressed. . . .

Instantly you're intrigued, if not intimidated. Whatever you think of Flaherty's place in the hierarchy of film-makers, you believe him to have been a decent, humane personality who would scarcely have extended compliments lightly to a Naziess. You can argue privately and some other day as to whether the cinematic "revelation" of Nazi psychosis would have had any influence on anything whatever. For the present you are going to see an Important Film—unquote. But two-days'-worth of the Olympic Games! The knees boggle. How documentary can you get?

Sunday afternoon and it's raining on 53rd St. Everywhere else, too. Not without misgivings, you enter the wet crush in the Museum's own bargain basement and wait among the aquatints and the lithographs with All Those Others: the Look-At-Me contingent from The Village, the earnest (heavily or mildly) boys and girls from Columbia (or N.Y.U., or C.C.N.Y., or The New School), the neutrals who pardonably just want the most from their sixty-cents'-worth of admission—and perhaps even an aging hero or heroine who competed in the Games of 1936 . . . You take a seat within reasonable distance of the door, just in case. The girl next to you opens a pocket-book edition of *The Life of the Bee*. Maybe she's smart. The houselights go down; small subtle ones come on in the ceiling. Just enough light for taking notes—*if* it's necessary.

Olympia, 1936! Part One. Martial music. The introductory credit informs you that this colossal reportage was undertaken by a horde of photographers who employed everything from pocket Leicas to telescopic lenses and took their vantage points in towers, in underground pits, on wheels, in underwater compartments and in balloons (also, as you will later infer, hanging by their thumbs). Four language versions of the film were made, and two years were occupied in the cutting process . . . All right, so it's thorough. You can just bet it's going to be thorough!

The opening image is a mass of clouds or murk which the camera slowly penetrates. Boulders. Slabs of stone. A fractured landscape, wuthering . . . Broken columns. Weed-riven steps. A collapsed cornice.

You get the point. Greece: ruins of the Olympiad site.

Flames. A naked youth apotheosized to carry the torch in relay. Leisurely cutting, as a succession of beach-boys trots the Grecian landscape, down to the verge of the sea and then, by way of "dissolves," up through the ages. The four elements—air, earth, fire and water.

Inevitable? All the same it's pretty damned impressive. Within five minutes you're more enthralled than patient; within twenty minutes it dawns on you that if this keeps up you're seeing one of the very great cooperatively made fact films on record . . . And it keeps up.

Much of it is Siegfriedian; all of it is imposing . . . At the top of a spectacular flight of steps, a Nordic male animal lights a cauldron which is to burn throughout the Olympiad. They've placed the cauldron where the sun will set directly behind it (like Reinhardt, who timed the striking of all the clocks in town for a scene in his open-air production of *The Miracle*); and there is one stunning shot of the flames licking and consuming the molten star as it sinks: a terrifying conceit when you recall the date—1936. *Morgen die Welt!*

After the fanfares, the shots of Hitler, the panorama of flags and the release of about a million doves (what a touch!), *Olympia* gets under way; from now on you're in the hands of an excellent (if, at times, unconsciously comic) British announcer, of you don't know how many hundred cameramen as ubiquitous as Mercutio's Queen Mab, and of a film editor (or staff of them) brilliant as they come. The announcer gets his first laugh from the audience (let's agree: there's nothing sharper than a New York audience): naming the entrants for the first event, he declares cheerfully, "Another American! They keep popping up!"

Now the strategy, generally speaking, is established. Wide-angle shots of the event, the particular stage, so to speak: the stretch, the pit, the circle; move in, oversee, participate. From the total action to the detail. Whole to part; part to whole. Medium-distance shot, close-up face on, profile, low-level, overhead.

Jesse Owens' jaw-muscle tightens; a vein throbs in his temple; he swallows.

The man in the white coat (he looks like a village butcher) warns, with an upward inflection, *"Fertig!"* Runners up on their toes and fingertips. Two seconds of dry-mouthed tension. The gun goes off and the sprinters leave with a velocity suggesting they've been shot from its barrel.

The cameras do their jobs, methodically, and with unflagging variety of witness point, reporting their subject—Competition. The track event, the shot put, the discus, the hurdles, high jump, broad jump. You're overhead, underneath, running parallel, out in front, or standing by politely. Cameras pan, swivel, tilt, track or just wait. You confront the polevaulter as he begins his run, or you concentrate

on the pole's point, merely, as it goes into the ground. Or you wait and crane your neck as the vaulter comes over on top of you. Or you go up with him on a pole of your own and just grunt. And in one shot you remain focused on the pole pit, and see the action in shadow only.

Slow motion. The weight throwers bounce in an unearthly levitation, sponge-like, straining to keep their momentum from carrying them over the chalk line.

The girls take the high jump; legs almost horizontal scissor suggestively before your eyes.

Faces: Nordic, Celtic, Mediterranean, Oceanic, Asiatic. Monkey faces; dog faces; horse faces; pig faces. And bull necks.

Heads: Dolicho-, brachy- and mesocephalic.

The look of strain.

The set of determination.

The expression of surprise.

The controlled elation.

Chewed lips, knit brows; the shrug, and the faint smirk that says "Take *that!*"

The British announcer again: "It's a serious business, this putting the shot."

Tensions of the Olympics audience, intercut. Italians jump into the air, gesticulate and yell. Germans look stolid or allow themselves a quiet, triumphant tic, one side of the face at a time. Hitler grins (Germany has just won something). The German rooting section intones *"Sieg Heil,"* the Japanese chant "Nish-i-da, Nish-i-da"; the French project crisply something resonant you don't quite catch; an American claque gives its rah-rah-rah, though not as intensely organized as on native ground. And somewhere in the middle of it all, a tidy group of English youngsters enunciates: *"We want you to win! We want you to win!"*

Fertig!

Most of the music (by Herbert Windt) sounds like Richard Strauss (even when it's good) and the rest like the Mars movement of "The Planets" suite, by Holst, most effective where it accompanies the flight of the javelins, a trembling roar and a high-pitched chord as they plunge, quivering, into the ground. The Japanese and the Filipinos look atavistic as they grasp their javelins weapon-wise—suddenly centuries (or at least oceans) removed, spearing a boar in the jungle or a seal from a hide boat.

Sieg Heil! We are the great companions! What do you see, Doktor Freud? *I see men and women everywhere*—mutually exclusive. The primary sexual inhibition of our time here gets conditional sanction. Never has there been so much public intrasexual hugging and kissing, as the vicarious embrace the victorious, and not all of it unconscious. A German girl, the favorite in the high jump, leaps to success, the focus of hungry female eyes, caught by the cameras with their usual impartial pertinence (or shall you say impertinent partiality?). She throws herself to the ground and is covered by a blanket; a minute later the camera pivots back as she watches her competitor. In the corner of the frame you glimpse another girl's arm moving to encircle her . . . Behind you in the theater a woman's startled voice asks, "Who's *that?!*" and her male companion answers knowingly, "Her *coach,* I suppose!" . . . You hear a low rumble, apparently from the sound track, which you can't quite identify in the context: premonitory, subterranean. Later you realize it was merely subterranean: the 8th Avenue subway train on its way to Jamaica, reverberating beneath the Museum's auditorium.

Night comes down over the Berlin field. The cauldron burns brightly, illuminating the hopes of thousands, heating the sinister ambition of millions . . . The pole-vaulters carry on. A record must be broken. Up and over! Hands leave the pole only at the last inch of moment, as if the pole were being gently planted, while its planter rises reluctantly to the dark sky. A weary Japanese boy shakes his head in the flickering light, resigning himself visibly to the fates before he starts his brief run; you can feel him calling up all his reserve of adrenalin. Up!—and over. Not quite! He dislodges the bar and the film audience, well in it now, expresses disappointment with a kindred groan. The British announcer says, extenuatingly, "Oh well—he must be tahd!"

Shot of empty stadium, ringed by searchlights, like a mountainous shower-curtain. Dissolve to a tolling bell, from the bell to the cauldron, from the cauldron to the flags of all nations, revolving, ascending and descending in double exposure. The Olympics flag with its linked circles. The cauldron again and smoke rising. Berlin, 1936. Trumpets.

Lights . . .

Indubitably you are still at 11 E. 53rd St. You rise, disoriented but surcharged with vicarious energy. The girl in the next seat is finishing another paragraph in *The Life of the Bee.* You wonder if

she comes here to read. Why not? Probably it's more comfortable and no more distracting than where she lives . . . Swaggering from the auditorium, you take the stairs to the street floor, three at a time, potentially invincible. You consider inspecting the authentic Japanese house which has been reassembled in the Museum's garden, but the consideration is short-lived; your Sagittarian impulses resent being Librafied. Corrupted by kinesis, you want nothing so much as to broad-jump the pond or to polevault over the garden railings into the middle of 54th St. You telephone a friend with whom you're to have dinner. You ask him if he has any liniment.

Second day. No rain but the streets are damp. The quiescence of the Japanese house seems more appealing—the uncluttered life . . . The Museum theater is not as full and the Monday audience has a more distinct air of professional curiosity. The Bee-girl is not in attendance. Perhaps she has resumed her studies in the more cavernous privacy of the Radio City Music Hall.

Olympia, Part II, is clearly the object of more artifice than Part I. Reportage is giving way further to poetry. . . . The opening is pastoral: a Siegfried idyll or an ode to matutinal joy. Dawn; beetle on a dewy leaf and birds caroling. No Disneyizing. No editorial comment. The camera speaks, unaided . . . The houses sleep. Only the lawn sprinklers are active. Contracted sun-rays splinter, making crosses and stars in the interstices of the trees, and a lone youth lopes through the woods. The community stirs itself—not yet to compete but to limber. Men shadow-box, relax their necks, kick soccer-balls, walk with ludicrous short steps, raising their knees high, like herons. Others merely have their calves massaged while they lie smiling at the sun. Even the Germans look happy. The girls enact similar prologues but since on the whole they are less attractive, clouds and sunbeams are wisely superimposed on the montage.

The stadium fills again; the preliminary exhibition is an unstinting display of *Kultur.* This is gymkhana with a vengeance. Battalions of German man- and womanhood (but you can barely tell women from men without a program) perform a joyless if intrepid ceremony of calisthenics. They leapfrog leather-bound horses and indulge in tendon-pulling feats of skill on horizontal bars, evoking every moment an intent if unintentional political myth: tempting the precarious balance, straddling the pit, suspended cruciform in mid-air with horizontal arms clutching iron rings. The women distend their thigh

muscles, clench their jaws, knot their biceps, split themselves through the pelvis, as if to see how far they can submit their femininity to the test of rupture . . . Hitler smiles. (He's got doves in his gloves).

International rivalry is resumed, and the swimming matches are as fleet, as breathtaking, as anxiously observed by the omnipresent and nimble cameras as everything else . . . With the high-diving event, objectivity falters; the provocation for a sortie of expressionism was too strong. At this point, Fraulein Riefensthal or whoever must have decided, with sweeping disregard for the nominal subject, "To hell with the Olympics! Let's just make a glorious movie!" . . . Shots, low-level and diagonal, of a diver impelled from the springboard, hinging in air against a sun-edged cloud. Cross-cut to another. Increase of pace by cutting the duration of each shot. The sequence becomes a fantasia of springing divers, outlined against the chiaroscuro sky, "not to eat, not for love" but only diving. You no longer know or care who is diving for what team or with what score. Surely these flexed and soaring figures are meant to poise themselves, step tiptoe, bounce, jack-knife, twist in half gainers, spiral, swallow-flight and swan eternally, with trumpets to herald their abrupt ascent and their plummeting fall. The camera as Wagner? Yet more to the point of analogy you are reminded, by way of Malraux, of the clay models of divers Tintoretto used from which to paint his cloud-borne angels.

After hours (or should you say miles of footage) at a nervously dynamic *presto,* modified only by intermitted snatches of slow-motion, an *allegro moderato,* nautical, sets in with the yacht races on the Kiel canal. In order to preserve the necessary ratio of tension, since to the eye a racing sail-boat has a totally different rhythm of suspense from a running man, a zooming javelin or a bounding diver, the camera's witness point and the tempo of the cutting are artfully manipulated. As the boats veer into the wind around the buoys with gunwales almost under, you move in suddenly to get the vertigo sensation of a slumping list to port and glimpse the quick action of hand-over-hand hauling or a scramble for the tiller; and in one magnificent head-on shot, with a convoluting wave in the foreground, the victor's bow rights on a swell to perpendicular and the spinnaker sail bellies out like a triumphal banner, beautiful and strange as a sea-born flower.

There is no breaking of stride in this cinematic ingenuity. Still Aquarius-bound, you are next parallel with and abreast of the shell-racers, whose brief, synchronous, exacting efforts compose one of the most rhythmically exciting effects in the world of organized sport.

Here you can only guess, wildly, how some of the shots were obtained, for during one explosive sequence you are in a half-dozen boats within fewer seconds, each time squarely confronted by a faceless coxswain with a megaphone strapped over his mouth like a gas-mask, yelling "Stroke!" in six different languages! . . . Surely this is the climax, you hope, since you are by now solicitous of the film editor's ability to keep this material going with sustained interest. You need not be. After this, the cross-country bicycle grind, the appalling steeple-chases and that punishing trial of versatility, the Decathlon, captured in a walkaway by a prodigy from California, Glen Morris—now a name in a sports almanac (after an inglorious interlude as one of Hollywood's Tarzans).

Not the least remarkable job of photography (again challenging your credulity and your inferences) is the exhausting marathon, cross-country, where, in one instance, you conclude that the cameraman is either sitting on the contestant's shoulders, like Sinbad's Old Man of the Sea, or is spying from a low-flying balloon that casts no shadow. (Nothing would surprise you; Abel Gance, a French film director, once tied his camera to the tail of a "runaway" horse!). But in this case the plausible (and more prosaic) explanation is that the runner (the plodder) was followed by a car from which a camera was suspended from a boom over his head. (This is your guess and you're stuck with it). Anyway it's uncomfortably astonishing to look down and see those feet as close as if they were your own, lifted up and set down in a grueling battle against fatigue and spots before the eyes. You wonder if he felt like a donkey, with the carrot above instead of beyond his reach. Or was he past feeling anything but the unyielding ground and the cruelly receding finish line?

The Finale involves more swirling flags, the stadium in a long shot and again the tolling bell . . . . . *Never send to know—*

Well, what *have* you seen? A documentary record of the Olympic Games—it says here. You can do better than that. The organization of a life-force made into art by the collaboration of sensitive instruments . . . But as you leave the auditorium you overhear a skeptic saying, "With all those cameras, you couldn't miss!" The hell you couldn't and the hell they don't! Try to find an equal five minutes in the billion feet you've seen of Fox Movietone, Pathé and Paramount: The Eyes, Ears, Nose and Throat of the World. You saw nothing like this. *Olympia, 1936* is not a newsreel; it is history,

aestheticized. And what else? For the hindsight implications are rampant while you smoke your cigarette among the lithographs once more. Berlin, 1936—made possible by Berlin, 1934—the Reichstag. The flames rise as they'd risen before and would again: 1939, 1941, 1945 . . .

The participants. What happened to *them?* Where are they now —the ones who didn't play Tarzan or who didn't survive to cherish the fallen arch, the fatted calf, the varicose vein? *By brooks too broad for leaping?* . . . All that prowess and mindless agility. The gratuitous beauty of keeping fit. Two thousand sets of coordinated muscles dedicated to an exhibitionism where victory (apart from the scoreboard) is so often a collapse, a speechless gasp or an ugly convulsion, like a parody of sexual ecstasy; where the reward is a wreath of myrtle placed on the brows, in this case by the Reichsführer's Rhinemaidens, in khaki with overseas caps. *Sieg Heil! Allons enfants! Of Thee I Sing!* Images of humanism disporting not only for national aggrandizement but also for the edification of a piece of human filth who will subsequently break their limbs on the beaches of Normandy, bury their torsos under the leaves of the Ardennes, splinter their javelins on the coasts of Italy, shatter their swan-dives over the fires of Kiel. *Pro patria mori.*

The massive folly of the physical. Organized athletics, a perennial structure for collectivizing the beautiful, the belligerent and the hollow; valid symphony of and for Hydra, and pandemic rationale of the third sex for whom, like Whitman, life can be verified only by the smell of sweat from a million armpits . . .

All the same, you've seen a great movie, and you wonder whatever happened to Loki Riefensthal. *(The Thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now?)* Did Adolf the Hammer ever realize that *Olympia, 1936* was an act of treason? The redemption of the adrenal cortex by the creative eye? The vindication of mass by perspective?

The aim was to win. The Americans won—that is, the contest. But Germany won, too. You've just seen the winner: a lyric wrested from the enemies of the lyrical.

The bust outlasts the citadel . . . . . Sometimes.

Outside the Museum it's raining again.

JASCHA KESSLER:

Fat Aaron and the Night Rider

I

Fat Aaron was a bloated angel. This is what the mothers called him, winking that smile about things you weren't supposed to know. Mothers, aunts, they would have been sweetly right to put it this way —you couldn't be supposed to know yet. Then, their secret might have washed down safe with coffee and buttered rolls; then, their innocent suns would have careered unswerving and unspotted above the summer, neat and simple over the rolling haymeadows, golden with birdsong and buzzing clover, in that good morning reserved for children since the night Adam covered Eve, children who are set apart romping in an idyll, still growing quiet as appleblossoms in spring.

In such dumb warm August nights the Holstein bull over the next hill bellowed black and white through the hours of that teeming darkness; he rattled the steel chain ringed in his mist-snorting muzzle, and the clanking links of his celibate bondage rang through the roar that yearned out of the pink giant skin bags swollen between his shanks, and burst from the organ pipes of his heaving chest, thundering over the valley to rattle the boards of the sleeping barns. The fields seethed with chirruping crickets, the heavens dripped meteor milk, there! there! there! A hot wind rushed up from the panting earth; flowers, berrybushes, wheatstalks of grass burst their skins; the ground reeked with the rank musk, juice and scents from the wrestling bodies and mixed sweat of things. In such nights you squatted round the gloam of a weenyroast fire as the spuds pulsed idol eyes hot in the ruined embers of a jungle temple, looking up at those bombinating skies, humming songs, and dabbling fingers with freckled brown girls whose mouths were fruit, moss their hair, and their downy arms baskets to cradle your soft melon head. While far below on the porches of the clumped cottages the mothers miched over cards and tea, or strolled the road where their flashlights glimmered like squids' eyes beneath a hot sea.

And yet, there I was, in that August, untaught, a rough boy camping on screes in the shabby tents of childhood among the stone mountains of a no land. I had trekked out willynilly from Egypt

with all its wealth. I had escaped that plentiful slavery of old Nile's beastheaded wizards; my garden memory was a starveling now: palaces and towers, those cities of daisies and barley where we played with blocks, gathering straw to make the bricks to make the temples and tombs—Rameses, Luxor, Heliopolis, Pithom, Thebes—distant now, fading hieroglyphs the sands in their whorling drifts scrabbled away. And the new scrolls, inscribed with new chronicles and new behests of blood and tears, my clumsy hands could not unwind nor my shaggy eyes read. Though there was a black thunderhead beckoning in the dog days, and an arm of stuttering fire by night, there was no voice in that furious music. Until I heard Fat Aaron's. And I knew he was to be the arcane, masterful rabbin of this season.

Fat Aaron was the bakery man. He delivered to the bungalow colonies. About eight in the morning the truck would bounce, bang, hurtle up the driveway, that sassy horn tooting, and skid along to a rest as if it had no brakes and no driver. The women would collect at the back. Then he trundled out of the cab, puffing and heaving, pawing and pinching his way through them to the doors. Once at his station he dispensed breads, rye and pumpernickel and wholewheat and white, sticky jellybuns, cinnamon buns and cupcakes. They dribbled from his fat fingers into the paperbags, the endlessly fluttering doves of dough miraculous with each sweep of the arms. And like the greatest of Magi palming the eggs of milk and honey, he kept up his pudder all the while, with every bagful a daub of smut. The long rolls called saltsticks he called "pacifiers," or "Wednesday husbands"; cherries in the pie he said were gathered from the hotels clustered around Swan Lake; and the plain burntsugar drynutted coffeecake was "Ol' Sarah."

I never heard enough of the pitch to quite make sense from the outside, and I was never allowed to push through the harem of housecoats. There were the heads all pressed together, pronged with those big aluminum curling pins, from among which the gray tendrils of cigarette smoke threaded up into the clear mountain morning. I'd hear his mumbling treble mutter. They would knee each other in their blueveined thighs, wallop one another's loose rumps, and screech with laughter. He was giggling too, burbling rather; the chortle foamed out of his lungs, and coughed through the tight fat channel of his throat as if they were tickling him. And, though their ringed hands, their strong bonyknuckled, longnailed, fishchopping, meatslapping, carrotscraping, redpainted fingers picked at and patted and poked him, could he have felt anything through that blubber massed

on his breast which curved under his arms from his broad back, rolling to settle over the lead vat of his vast belly? When they had their day's bread the knot broke; each went clopping back in her slippers to her bungalow for breakfast, grinning. Sometimes one raised a word of raucous warning that Fat Aaron had had for another across the grounds: "Sadie! If you can't sleep, don't try to beat it. Go see the big specialist down at the bakery!" At which a chorus of chokes and sniggles racketed through the screendoors from half a dozen coffeemugs.

I puzzled about Fat Aaron's being a bloated angel. He weighed three hundred pounds. He had the whitest lily skin, a great round head of golden curls, moist lips, cupid lips of wet pink, and downy cheeks red as McIntoshes. His skin was so white and smooth, white as the flour on his white baker's trousers. A cherub without wings I might glimpse in him, but not a seraph. Not pure, refined from all sensuality, a mature specimen of any of the host, not one of the thrones, dominations, princedoms, virtues or powers. But even cherubic there was something terrible about him. Not the fatness, though he was like those chubby hovering infants, with their gold heads and disingenuous expression: not baby, yet not adult—and you noticed their things even if they were angelic boys. They were more naked somehow than the grand naked women sprawling on velvet, more naked than a holy fat child in its mother's lap. Maybe it was his blue eyes, chunks of lake ice they were; maybe the frizzled cigarette burning always in his mouth of sharp white teeth.

II

It was near twelve Sunday night. The town still woke. Busses and cars yapped south to the city; happy people rested in the juices of the flesh were driving to the week's sweltering work. The prison gates of the rancid theater grated shut at my back and I stood in the dusty threshold of Main Street. The ache of murder was in me: my heart lusted after payrolls and molls. Warner Brothers had marked me a snarling four-reel con; my eyes were gorged with blood, my nose pulped, cheeks and skull scarred by pistolwhippings, my feet dragged the irons of a spirit brought to book. I took desperate bearings for our cottage and cut out of town.

Then, climbing the sharp hill that led my way home, I came into the cold native air blowing from the stars. Where the last sidewalks gave out, the last houses were humped snoring shadows. I stepped

onto the westering macadam road for the two miles. A young moon floated at the end of it, just above the dark world's edge. It was the sire of the Holsteins, the wonderful metalled horns of the father of bulls, who cropped whole forests in his grazing meditation. The thin arc of the young moon was a boomerang brandished by the hunter of king kangaroo, who was stalking into the long Pacific combers of the night sky, the last of the aboriginal pride. It was a Viking galley; the road unrolled towards it, wavering over a blue tundra, the track upon which the wolfpelted plunderer marched. The young crescent was the mythological brow of the silver queen: the grassroot congress of katydids fiddled her virtues night long, the cottontails mumbled praises as they munched their silver salads, the owls swooped on silver fieldmice for her sport, and in deference to her virgin nudeness most creatures dropped their eyes and slept.

I topped the rise and glanced good midnight to the town sputtering out below. A truck careened past me going downhill like the yellow ghost of a comet. It was the Manna Bakery's. I turned and walked after it. There was a crossroads a few blocks back where the bakery loomed; when I came to it the truck was parked for lading against the sliding doors. I sidled up to them and stuck my nose through to get a look at the plant.

The air inside was hot moist and delicious with the aroma of baking dough: hot poppyseed, hot sesame, nuts, nutmeg and ginger, cinnamon and cloves. At the near end were tables loaded with baking trays; on the floor the great wicker baskets were lined up, some already filled with breads and heaped rolls. In the center of the vaulted room there were grouped the mixing machines, coated with flour dust, all rumbling and churning, their pronged steel arms plunged in steel cauldrons of golden batter, revolving this way and that, backward and forward and around. Far down was the bank of roaring gas ovens, and their attendant, Fat Aaron.

He was the only one there. He was ladling loaves out of the black maws of his ovens with a twentyfoot pole. His shirtsleeves were rolled up to the bulging elbows; a linen apron stained with the stiff goo of white icing, splattered with chocolate and the blood of tarts, draped from his neck to his ankles like a white caftan. He was monumentally brisk. A dozen breads at one scoop came out on the tongue as he stepped back, balancing his staff, and tipped them into a basket. After some hundred, he clanged the last little door to and turned around. He walked deliberately to me as far as the center of the hall, holding the long heavy shovel lightly upright in his right hand, and stopped mid the

cluster of his thumping dancing machines, where he planted the regal ash of his baker's sceptre. His left arm swung out to invite me in. He smiled. In his high reedy voice he laughed, "Sholom, sonny! Come into the ark of my tabernacle."

He waggled a derisive wrist at the ceiling. "There's nobody else here tonight to keep me company but the living god: Baal-Berith, the lord of cookies and cupcakes; Baal-zebub, the lord of leavened loaves; Baal-phegor, the lord of the little broken hardon. Adonai must be lonely; he needs quiff to keep him company. You should have brought a girlie with you. We'd have tickled some cunny juice from her: that makes good cake."

The batter had begun to thicken; he adjusted the mixers to a slower stroke. I was set to filling a tray with cupcake paper. After a while he switched off one of the machines; when he pressed another button the arm drew up out of the sucking yellow stuff in the vat.

"Take a taste of this," he said as he stroked the vanes of the beater. Batter dripped from them and diffused in the rest of the mixture. I ran my thumb over an edge. I said it was good, and it was better actually than after it was baked.

"Dropped from heaven," he sighed modestly, lolling a pious head to one shoulder.

"What's in it, vanilla?"

"Sure, sonny. Vanilla, and a little flour, and some scraping off the floor; ten pounds of butter, a squirt of machine oil, and a little spit." He giggled at the expression on my face. "You don't believe? The baker's spit is good: the breath of life, the smoke of ruach, like God's in the mouth of the gingerbread Adam." He hawked, and spat a nicotined glob into a pot still on the mix.

"Come here and hold this sack." He handed me a long cone-shaped linen bag which had a wooden nipple at the apex. I held it spread open; he tipped the cauldron and poured the stiff batter into the open end, shoving it over with his palm. Then he slipped a ring over the gathered ends and knotted them. The whole sack went under his arm like a suckingpig to market. As I laid out the paper molds, he squeezed the dough through the nipple with pressure from his arm against the sack as it rested on his hip, and with two fingers flipped each gobbet neatly into a cup.

We worked fast. "What about the icing?" I asked when we were done.

"It's already made for this batch. Next time, sonny, you'll help. You're young and pure. It's a boy's sweet seed I need for icing.

That makes it good!" He squealed, drumming his belly.

I helped him load the baskets of bread into the pungent truck, and we went off full gun. Fat Aaron drove with his belly, so tight did that girth press into the wheel. One arm lazed out the window, the other was dropped comfortingly on my shoulders: the roads were his, he did as he pleased. The Manna truck had been so tinkered with, the muffler magnified the blast of each cylinder's stroke, groaning and boiling on the upgrades with a monstrous catarrh, and letting off slobbish dysenteric grenades as it zoomed down slopes. The nightly passage of this dragon through fifty miles of countryside was wanton; it expressed the joyous contempt and abandon of the driver who plied the gas-pedal of the highballing thing. The slipstream dragged sparks from the cigarette in his mouth. He handed me one from his shirt-pocket and I lit it from the tip of his.

He said, "This is one of the beautiful facts of life. You don't know enough to like it. You're still a kid, cabbage is the leaf of your heart. Look at you, you're skinny with innocence. But me, I deliver the staff of life, I'm round on all sides, white bread and dark bread and nutty dough."

I laughed at him. He pulled over and stopped on the peak of the spur of Walnut Mountain. "And here's another fact." He drew a bottle of whiskey from under his seat, drank, and passed it to me. "It might burn at first, but drink it."

It seared; I swallowed bravely each time he urged me. We walked to the edge of the road. "Look at that country," he said. "Soon it's going to be all yours; but you won't like it."

"It looks all right to me," I said.

"Yes, from here that quilt looks like a bed of delights. But once you get down there for a good whiff it's all small, it crawls with scurrying sucking people. They're vampires."

I didn't say anything. From that height I made nothing of it. Yes, a bed, heaped and various, of hummocks and pastures and glacier-rolled valleys, stands of trees under starlight like patches of black broccoli, ponds and lakes where there was darkness visible, and simple scattered blocks of guileless habitation. What could he see, I wondered, in that lambent void which was to my vision mere massy landscape?

He drank and continued, "Look over there. Swan Lake. We'll drive to the hotels, The President, The Ambassador, The Swan Lake. That's a world chock full of girlies. The lights are still on in their rooms. You know what they do all night? They dance and they

swizzle. They stand by the windows naked, and they comb their hair and look at the stars. Lovely. What I see in those bully buildings you couldn't imagine. Let's go, sonny."

I leaped to my saddle in the truck and he squeezed in behind the wheel once more. The road coasted around the south end of the lapping waters of Swan Lake and descended between ranks of maples and poplars. We ran down and turned into a gravel strip that led to the rear of The President. Most of the windows, line over line for five stories, were dark. We lugged several baskets into the quiet kitchen. In the vague light the long galvanized tables gleamed dimly. The stoves and sinks and dishwashing machines were empty, quite dead; the floor was a holystoned spotless deck. Only an old white tom hissed, stretched himself, and shuffled away.

While Fat Aaron scribbled the bill, I went outside to look around again. The buildings seemed asleep; there was no life of the night to be seen. I strained to see something. There, it might have been the glimmer of a languorous form; no, there, what I thought was a lifted arm and the nubile ivory of a breast, a delicate hand caressing the rondure of a young belly. No. Yet they must be there behind the bluey sheets of glass; any moment a shade would roll generously up, or a ripple of cuddled laughter would sound. But the night brought only the sough of summer through foliage, the clunk of rowboats against the little wooden wharves a hundred yards off.

We stopped at The Ambassador, The Swan Lake. We delivered orders. Fat Aaron whispered of what he'd seen just the night before; he pinched me and prophesied wonders. And, yes, there were some lights, there were momentary insignificant shadows that moved in rooms; there were some murmurous voices, the tinkle of a dropped tumbler, gushes of water in hidden plumbing; but no music, none of the promised cries of ecstasy, no noises of pleasure at all.

Each time he came from the kitchens he asked me what I'd seen, and I shrugged in disappointment. "It's there," he insisted, "you're blind, sonny. The world is too cunning for you." His eyes brimmed conviction as he flapped pictures with his obscene magical fingers. "But wait, we'll go up to Miriam's at White Lake. She keeps the gold calf. I'll show you what's what."

By that time my brains were flaring. We bowled along in the skies, plunging and rearing with the contours of the earth. Fat Aaron cursed and laughed and sang words I couldn't distinguish in queer tunes that never were, and he made the truck skitter at sixty miles an hour.

Then we were there. I stepped down in front of an old foursquare frame building sided over to simulate logs. It was a tavern backed by the lake: The Harvest Moon. About a dozen cars were parked off under the trees. Inside, the lanterns over the bar were dimmed; the front door was locked, but the lights on the second floor glowed through drawn blinds, and a jazzy hullabaloo was blaring upstairs.

He rattled the door. No one came. He kicked it, and sent me to hold down the horn of the truck. Finally, a shape appeared and moved along the bar. "Miriam," he whispered. The door was opened to us. They grappled on the sill. In a bassoon throat as deep as his was high she boomed out, "Angel cake! I thought I'd have to have a party without you. Come on in, virgin, you're on time; the joint's jumping. . . . Who's the man of the world?"

"Sonny? I was shorthanded tonight, so I snatched him from his pisspot of a mother. He's pimply, but he looks already at home with that bottle."

"Doesn't he stare!" she rumbled, and, latching hold of my ear, yanked me to her. "What a sweet present, Aaron: a ladyfinger."

Miriam, cased in green satin, bangles and bracelets of gold on her arms, loops and rods of gold freighting her ears, was as big and as fat as Fat Aaron himself. Her hair was an auburn mane: without pins or curls, it parted from the middle of her brow and cascaded to her shoulders where it fell as it wished over her bare arms, down her back, and down the freckled expanse of two breathing monadnock breasts. She crushed my head between them and I smelled the thick richness of the living body of an orchard. But when she bent her head to kiss me, it blew a west wind of gin.

The stairs climbed to a posh parlor beneath whose scarlet ceiling clouds swayed of a strange sweet smoke. In the center of the room an ivory babygrand was surrounded by clubchairs in which a trombone, a clarinet, a sax, and a trumpet slouched. They made music that no leg or heart ever beat to. I slumped in a couch.

There was a throng in the house who drifted in and out of the music joined head to knees in a kissing sigh. Like smoke they came and they went; doors banged down halls; there was singing, laughter, men growled and shouted, women shrilled in delight, in pain, in anger; there were muffled chants such as I'd never heard, though human voices made them. And the music played on and on, slow and cavernous, so slow it barely moved, or whipping, looping in the eyes so swift it dazzled like sheet lightning in the muggy glow of

the room. The buzzing place was rank with the writhing and kicking of naked ruddy arms and legs.

Suddenly the trumpet flourished a clarion fanfare. I was yanked to my feet by a hand of long nails and rings twisted in my hair, and dragged to a ring where I swayed between the hips of two tall women whose arms were hot around me. The music had stopped. Then, with lonely hooched chords it began again.

Knees dipped, arms wagging loose before them, their bellies grinding and bumping, Fat Aaron and Miriam snaked to the center of the circle. Their faces shone by sweat; their eyes blank and orbed, they approached, gyred, retreated. The music stepped up its rhythm and the crowd clapped and stamped in time, shouting, "Go! Go! Go it!" The dancers thumped their backsides, bumped stomachs, swivelled, pressed and bumped, faster and faster. At the moaning climax their hands grasped each other's hair, the auburn and the gold. I joined in as the chorus yelled, "Go! Go! Go!" and I heard his whinny and her contralto laughter sounding over the music.

III

I knew in my stupor that I was back in the truck, running through mists. As we farewelled for dawn, simple years of prince and princess crowded cheering to the banks of childhood. I was aware of the wet road, the cool dripping gray trees and the dank fernery past which we rushed. He said nothing all the way. When the truck slowed on the last hill I stumbled from it with a loaf of bread under my arm. It never stopped, and as it picked up speed Fat Aaron's pinkwhite arm fumbled out and slammed the door shut. With a last sneering blat of exhaust, it disappeared over the russet crest of the hill into the jubilee of dawn.

I stood on the shoulder of the road breathing the dew-washed day. Rank upon rank of air in light, grain in the fields glinting against the first shafts of the fresh sun and rippling in the blue breeze, the grapes bunched from the green arbors, swallows barrelling over the treetops, the hawks spread in the upper skies. As I walked down to the colony across the wet lawn to the white cottage, the sun shone full hurrah for victory. So this was Canaan! The green flesh of the world, that solemn land, was mine.

ELEANOR ROSS TAYLOR:

Goodbye Family

The sounds I hear from the evening chambers
Stanch my breath.
Whether I sit alone in the parlor or whether
Ladies crack nuts and ice cubes there,
I hear the tiptoeing and the banging of heads
And my breath grows short, for fear
Of what I am doing there
Clanging and pacing in the rooms to come.
For *hate you* cut the friendly nerve
That let my lover shrug;
My stare froze down the only warmth
Another had, all her own;
Every year I dug and moved the peonies
Longing to bloom fat and chemically
By the well slab, ingrown.
Every day I opened the drawer
And inspected the knives:
Were there enough, sharp enough, for all lives?
The years to climb!
The walls to catch at!
To cut free and drop through the cloak closet
And cellar would be better—
Under the foundations of God's world
Swimming on my side, ear on shoulder, eyes unlettered,
And intellectuality an angle
Marking the area of obesity—
Frail fathead!
It's no use God's whistling
"Come back, Fido, come back,
I won't tease any more";
He shan't catch me again.
I'm in the glade
Remembering
I meant to tell my daughter—
I looked for you a cattail
But they were all silked out—;

And now the water
Meeting me around the curve
Roaring, blanks out all but ear;
Not in the day time, not in the dark time
Will my voice cut and my poison puff
My treasures of flesh,
My gems of flashing translucent spirit,
Nor my caress shatter
Them.

Araminta Dunlap, 1870

When I disrobed to go to bed
It seemed to me like something said:
Hold your shimmy round you tight
Somebody may be around tonight
Ain't no curtain, ain't no shade
Don't hurt none to be afraid—
Little David McSwain!

Walked us both home from the dance
Wearing new black homespun pants
When we got up to the door
Catched us both around the waist
And—kissed us! Lor!
What's he getting—kisses! from us for?
Little David McSwain!

. . . .

When Dave got up and struck a light
We'd neither of us slept a mite,
Been up and down with Tish all night
Out of my mind for fear she might
Go off like little Dave. They say
"Don't fret . . . another on the way. . . ."
They know I favor this least child.
No need to cry, I said. But while
I made a fire in the kitchen stove
I heard a pesky mourning dove.
Lor! What's he calling "O-love" for?

Wind

From the moment Gabriella died
At an exhausted, nightless morning time,
There began a knifestruck disattendance
In any place she might have chanced to be,
Even in places properly mine—
In my bedroom, at my fireside—
That made me rise at once and leave a room
Whenever her formal blank came in to me;
The one last-minute dry-pen silence drew
A steady, regretful, cancelling line through
All my blotted teas.
There was nothing to talk about,
And it was no use looking for anything,
In the cupboards, or out the door.
Long ago, something had eaten out my viscera,
And I was hungry, now, for years before.
My flaxseed-meal aunts touched my arm:
"Faith holds no room for such alarm—"
But the wind of a suddenly-turned season,
Hard, and raw enough to move a solid shadow,
Began in flaws to rush the outer closures
And wheedle through the inner apertures,
Calling together broken flowered cups
And uncommunicative inked-out reasons,
Recalling whistling losses that had hinged
On cheese toast and the cats' meals after meals;
I even felt my agonies in my cradle,
Alone, in the dark back bedroom, revealed
In the wind, fighting the oaks, seizing life just so.
In the wind's seizure I saw her
Trudging barefoot and mudfouled
Over the clay she was born of,
Fighting the clay with strength grown bodywise,
And wherever the dreamy, cultivated part of her had fled to—
It was not in her ghost, nervous, human eyes
I kept seeing.
Gabriella, howl!

JAMES B. HALL:

How to Make the Poem

Now a good job
Wants the prime and vicious timbers
With no gum, gnarl, or piss-eyed grain
Giving purchase when an ungreased axle
Grinds smoke from the hub's core,
In these times of winter;
So with the spokeshave and the auger's
Crafty tongue, contrive or warp
This oak: by fire blown on steel
And the hulked anvil heel

Center hub and spoke
Inside a rim's hot comprehension,
And look now, Brother, at this wheel:
She tracks in thresher's dust and through the mire
Of pigs, or weathers only in a barnyard
Reviled by sparrows.
No matter, that stuff stood in these woods,
Suckled by roots sunk through the old debris
Of glaciers, grew by connivance with this sun,
And so I think she'll hold.

But moment is place only,
This birth by word or spoke the same
As flint's revenge upon some sullen log
Scraped in fire to make canoes of war:
Mound Builder, Shawnee, what of your cries
Which named the sun
Towards morning. Therefore take me, tusk's
Destruction, adze edge, or even martin's
Hacking wing: crush me wheel, your maker,
Into this drift of meadow.

Boots stamping, heads jerking, the Conquerors raced around the podium shrieking, "Oodirtydad, oodirtydad, oodirtydad, oodirtydad."

"Vun, two tree, vun two tree, vun two tree, vun two tree," pounded the prostrate Conquered.

"Pang," went the yardstick and the Conquerors froze, arms extended, sweat tickling their stillness.

"Massachusetts," said Mr. Perkins, "a bloody state," and the class resumed their seats.

"Ahgony of ze bladduh," called Rigobert, the smallest of all the boys.

"Your sentence, Rigobert," said Mr. Perkins.

Clutching his right side, Rigobert recited, "Shane ze catuhpilluh, sad my oncle, so hees weengs cahnt grau. . . ."

"Mangle the coral and its blood will show," finished Mr. Perkins and he waited for the translation.

"Quand on lit trop vite, on n'entend rien. Shockespierre."

Rigobert bowed and left the room, passing Le Quillec on guard at the door.

"Sentence, Pinot," said Mr. Perkins to a pale, fattish boy in the first row.

"Ze barbair scrimed and waved ze bloody shears," and before Mr. Perkins could add the coupling line, Pinot went proudly on with "Tinking ze infant's blood its mudder's tears. *Le mal est aisé, le bien presque unique.* Calvin Coolitch."

He drew back quickly, just dodging Mr. Perkins' spit.

"Arrogant whoremaster," said Mr. Perkins and he walked slowly to the windows and looked out. "The minor villainies are weighed with the major, my dears. Look at the sky, *la terre,"* and he indicated the rows of bare trees along the banks of the hidden river with the yardstick while the class followed the motion, wide-eyed and silent. "It's made up of a trillion tentacles which, each minute, draw up our villainies to the heavens, *l'enfer,* and drop them into the destined receptacles of our blood. And, one day, our lives, *nos erreurs,* are gathered up, the vats overflow, and the sky runs with our blood." The yardstick arched slowly down to the dusty planks and Mr. Perkins walked back to the desk.

"Strethman," he called.

A rickety form rose, trembling, in the back row.

"Strethman, you look ravishable today. Hast thee on a new frock?" Mr. Perkins was quivering.

"Sair?" asked Strethman softly. He fingered his old brown sweater and shrank back towards his seat.

Mr. Perkins waved him down with a gesture of blessing. Strethman sat and put his head on top of his crossed arms.

"Il pleut, monsieur," called the class.

"There are times for weeping as for mirth, times for fronting, times for birth," chanted Mr. Perkins, and he walked back to Strethman and pulled his hair till the weeping stopped. "A new elegance today, my dears," he said, walking to the blackboard.

He printed, "A child's tears are the devil's pearls. *Le coeur pleut quand les vices triomphent.* Waldo Emerson."

"We will violate the vision drop by drop. *Nous répéterons la phrase mot à mot."*

Mr. Perkins led the class through the sentence. They repeated it individually and in small groups. He assigned the English to the Conquerors and the translation to the Conquered and the class chanted in round fashion, Mr. Perkins guiding the repeats and phrasings with the yardstick.

"Ze bahbee's tairs are ze davil's pairls. *Le coeur pleut quand les vices triomphent.* Valdo Emairso."

When the bell rang, there was instant silence on the words "tairs-*vices."* Mr. Perkins erased the blackboard, took up his briefcase and said, "Pleasant dreams, swine."

"Pleasant dreams, sair," called the class on their feet.

They continued to call "Pleasant dreams" until Mr. Perkins disappeared down the hall on the way to his next class.

JACK MATTHEWS:

The Antique Dealers

When he was in Pittsburgh Kirkendall often stayed overnight at the Flaschmanns' large brownstone mansion. The old couple irritated him somewhat, but he felt that it was eminently practical to stay there. Otto Flaschmann had mentioned one day in his downtown office that since virtually all of Kirkendall's dealings were with him he might as well stay at his place overnight, and they could talk business there. Otto was looking more fragile and older than ever and he liked to stay at home as much as possible where he was merely another, larger piece of Dresden.

And Kirkendall saw him now, as he was ushered into the front room, as an image refracted and confused with others. Kirkendall blew cold air and vitality into the room, and shook his coat off dynamically as if to stir things into reality. But Flaschmann's little, immaculately-tailored form only quivered infinitesimally. Finally he lent him a slight, liver-spotted hand and spoke out in a somewhat louder voice than one would expect.

"And how are antiques?" Otto asked.

"Business is only fair, Otto," Kirkendall said, glancing at the mirror above the mantel (both antiques) which reflected porcelain, jade, polished mahogany. . . . Kirkendall was struck by the peculiarity of this inevitable preface of Flaschmann's. As if the old man had to say "antiques." He could say "things" or "they." It was obvious that this fellow could conceive of nothing *but* antiques; or the antique business, which was a different matter, slightly. He could see the old man in his dressing robe, digging into a poached egg at breakfast and at the same time greeting his wife with, "And how are antiques?"

"Those things you sold me last spring," Kirkendall was saying, "didn't do *too* well. You know, glass is common now and my contact in Rochester—you know Bridges—came up with almost the same stuff. Glass, glass, glass." Kirkendall was suddenly aware that his voice was going on without him.

"And how is the Mrs., Otto?"

"She's a great deal better since the last time you saw her." The firm voice refocused the elusive image of Flaschmann for a moment,

and Kirkendall was nodding his head with an attentive look. ". . . . and as long as she doesn't—you know—try to do too much, why the doctor says that she'll be all right and that she'll probably live to be a hundred."

That'll give her another year, Kirkendall thought to himself, and he wished there'd been someone there he could have whispered that witticism to. But now his eyes were caught by a set of figurines on a small, marble-topped utility table near the sliding doors. Flaschmann's eyes, which looked a little glazed, didn't seem to notice whether he was listening or not, so after a bit Kirkendall fell completely to gazing at the figurines and wondering about them. The voice continued to recite about its wife's health, and, now and then, about antiques, with a kind of noble assertiveness in the great room, and for a distracting second, Kirkendall thought of a class in Rhetoric that he'd had in military school many years back. But mostly he was absorbed in reverie. The scene was Rochester, and he was toying with Bridges, who on the last trip had mentioned wanting very much just such a set of figurines as those on the marble-top table.

"Uh, pardon me, Otto, but I think I might have a buyer for those figurines over there if you'd want to part with them."

For an instant there seemed to be a flush of confusion on Flaschmann's face. Kirkendall wondered what the matter was; after all, he'd frequently dropped a hint about something in the old man's house and bought it right then and there. The old man was anything but sensitive where business was concerned. Besides he seemed to have an inexhaustible storehouse some place; nothing taken ever left a vacancy. Once Kirkendall had bought a Queen Anne chair and an end table right from this very room, and when he'd returned the next time the room had either been rearranged slightly or the table and chair had been subtly replaced, for Kirkendall couldn't remember where they had been, precisely, and the room seemed more cluttered than ever.

Flaschmann had regained his stare and recited, "You mean that eighteenth-century dancing pair?"

"Uh-huh. It's pretty interesting, and I might be able to get rid of it. Would you like cash for it?" It somehow appeared that Kirkendall was about to do the little man a rare service.

"Gee, I always kind of liked that," Flaschmann said with startling ingenuousness.

"Gee," Kirkendall repeated to himself. "Second childhood? Does

the old boy have maybe a marble collection?"

The look of confusion had returned, partially. Kirkendall reached into his billfold and pulled out a fifty-dollar bill. He sensed something painful in the situation, but he was a bit unsure of his part in it. "I'll give you fifty, Otto. I might get sixty, maybe sixty-five, on the other hand I may not get rid of it."

"I know, I know," said Otto, who knew the risks of the antique business, but who hadn't had a sufficient grasp of the current prices for several years now.

It's a miracle he's been able to hang onto his inheritance, let alone make a little money, Kirkendall thought. And, too, he thought that he was reasonably sure of getting at least a hundred and twenty out of the pair, but he subverted that consideration since it was imperative that he at least temporarily believe what he was saying. Besides, he might keep them for himself.

Through superior inertia, psychologically speaking, Kirkendall got the pair, although he went to fifty-five for them. Having triumphed over an essentially unworthy adversary, he sat back and lighted a king-size cigarette. He performed the ritual of the great-first-puff and regarded the fine little figure deposited in the opposite chair. He was surprised, and a bit offended, to realize suddenly that Flaschmann was looking downright lugubrious. Damn bad sport. And where's the Mrs.? He jerked his leg nervously for a few seconds and turned his mind toward Bridges in Rochester.

Mrs. Flaschmann came shortly after that and they had coffee and rolls. She had the same physical stamp as her husband, generally, with minor variations. Kirkendall always detected the same bleak and brittle expression upon which were played the unconvincing routines of courtesy. And with the Mrs.' coming, it became once more apparent to Kirkendall that his situation with them was actually inverted. It was as if he were the absentee landlord, or perhaps the host, for the odd, myopic little couple simply waited expectantly when Kirkendall came, as if *he* were supposed to act and *they* to follow.

And, of course, it always came about that he did precisely that. This evening he commenced fumbling among some old piano rolls that the Flaschmanns had brought over from Germany in 1928. Kirkendall was not at all insensitive to "serious music." In general, he inclined toward those classics which were emotional and large rather than subtle and sinewy. The Flaschmanns, on the other hand, were astonishingly ignorant of the whole business. They didn't know

who came first, Brahms or Beethoven. It was strange, too, because they had in the large cabinet he was now fishing in at least sixty or seventy rolls of very good things. And Kirkendall had heard them say that they played them often and, what's more, he could tell by their general appearance that this was so.

Kirkendall found a Chopin, a Saint-Saens and several others that appealed to him at the moment, and, after putting the Chopin on, he relaxed with a cigarette. The Saint-Saens label was quite worn, but Kirkendall was suddenly struck by something on it. His back was mostly turned from the old couple, at the moment, so without their being able to see he brought the roll up next to his face and studied it intently. But all he could make out, definitely, was part of the "Charles" and, of course, the "Camille Saint-Saens." And yet this was enough to set him thinking. He had read, or heard, within the past few years of some piano rolls that had been made from the playing of the great man himself and which had just (at the time of his reading or hearing of it) been discovered. Obviously, they were of inestimable value, except in terms of dollars, and the number of dollars such a rarity brought must have been prodigious, he reflected. He detected a date on the roll, too: 1912. Could it be authentic?

He played the roll, and indeed it was magnificent. "Inspired" was the word that presented itself to Kirkendall's consciousness for use in describing the experience in the future.

"Rather remarkable," he said with the tone of a jaded man being slightly stirred into half-susceptivity. He wasn't sure if the Flaschmanns heard him, for they simply sat there, unseeing, with their hands identically laid upon the respective arms of their chairs.

Shortly thereafter Kirkendall excused himself, and, at the same time, asked a not-unusual favor: to use the phone for a long-distance call. (He always paid immediately.) He retreated into the hall, pulling the slide doors to after him (the house was drafty) and placed his call for Philadelphia. Fortunately, connections were made immediately.

Flaschmann was lighting the large gas burner beneath the mantel when Kirkendall sliced himself back through the heavy oak doors. The old man tottered upright, and settled in his chair.

"Thank you, Otto dear," his wife said, and Kirkendall, as he sat down, was confused by a certain radiance in her voice and look. Then he realized that he couldn't cheat them on a deal like this. It wasn't that he hated them secretly. Maybe he despised the old man

now and then, but that was because there was something so unreal about him. Both of them were remote, and even intangible. And this bothered Kirkendall. They were a conduit that led out of his experience into a land which was strange and barren. Like a tundra where there is nothing but wind and space, except the thousands of little flowers that crop up incomprehensibly during the quick summer. All of his other contacts—Bridges, Benjamin, Forest—were integers, objects. They were things he could touch with finality and significance on his semi-annual circuit. They were like bases in a ballpark which Kirkendall could touch with his foot as he sped around the infield—progressing and counting as he passed them. But Flaschmann was a base some crazy person had thought of after the game was over—when the ballpark was dark and quiet; a base which was there and yet which wasn't there; which if a person tried to touch might prove to be not there, causing the person to hurl himself into the vacancy of a darkened left field, beyond which there was no wall.

But Kirkendall was in command of himself when he settled back in the pneumatic leather chair and tapped a new cigarette on his silver case. He smacked his lips, and stirred, and—as he raised the match to the cigarette, with his face contorted around the object—he said, "That was Benjamin I was just talking to."

"Oh?" said Flaschmann. "How is Benjamin?"

"Okay. I thought you might have something in that Saint-Saens roll. You know Saint-Saens was alive when that was made?"

"Oh, was he really?" Mrs. Flaschmann said. "Well, that roll has an interesting history for us, hasn't it, Dear?"

Flaschmann said yes, but rather quietly, as if he didn't want Kirkendall to hear. And after he said it he stared at Kirkendall without bothering to explain what that history was. Mrs. Flaschmann was smiling to herself, and looking at the backs of her nails.

"What was his name, Otto?" she said finally. "He was a Spaniard," she said to Kirkendall, as if that explained everything.

"Carlos Bessira," the old man said with the intonation of a reverent historian reciting a Truly Great Name.

"Yes. That's it," she said. "Well, we knew him in Berlin. Otto had known him for several years, and he was there making piano rolls in 1912. And this roll," she said, pointing with her hand shaking toward the cabinet, the piano and the rolls on the bench, "this roll was the first one manufactured from his playing."

"That's right," Otto said. And he walked over and put it on to play again.

Kirkendall sat there meditatively, smoking and blinking at his body sprawled before. "You know, I thought maybe Saint-Saens had made that roll himself. He did make some rolls, you know."

"Oh, dear no," Mrs. Flaschmann said. "Is that why you called Mr. Benjamin?" She was smiling.

Kirkendall nodded and laughed. He felt uncomfortable.

Otto was gazing at him serenely with (could it be?) a twinkle hovering in his eyes.

Kirkendall fussed about his room for fifteen minutes or so, examining this and that, before crawling up into the giant bed. The bed had a strawy, crisp quality to it which reminded him of a bed he'd slept in at his grandmother's many years ago. Only there he'd gone to sleep with the smell of manure and hay mingling in the room, with the night breeze causing the frayed, white curtain to swim back and forth in the window.

He spent a long time staring up, with his hands folded behind his head and the cover tucked up beneath his chin. He heard the toilet down the hall flush twice, then the old house was quiet. Kirkendall listened hard, wondering if maybe he could hear a dog barking far in the distance as he used to hear at his grandmother's in the summer. But it was winter, and there were no stars in the sky. *This is a strange house. Life is a funny thing. I wonder how long Otto and the Mrs. will live. Will they be dead this time next year? Will I? I could be, even if I am young. How many rooms in this house?*

He closed his eyes hard, and little lights cascaded inward from the tight lids. He rolled and fretted, and finally slept.

The next morning they had oatmeal, poached eggs, toast and coffee, and while the Mrs. helped the maid clean up, Otto and Kirkendall went into the front room. A wind had risen during the night, and there were big, wild slaps of rain hitting the window. Kirkendall walked over and looked out to see if his car (which he hadn't put in the garage last night) was okay. It was glistening and black, parked there beneath the skinny, bare trees, and Kirkendall had a recurring sense of competence. It was a nice car. It would be a rough drive up to Erie, then to Rochester.

"This is a massive place you have here, Otto," Kirkendall said suddenly, as he turned from the large window.

The old man, dressed nattily in a tweed suit this morning, nodded and smiled. "We like the old house," he said.

But the image of Flaschmann faded and became diffused like something printed from a runny negative, and Kirkendall hovered, interested, above an odd table near the front window he'd been looking out of. A cat stirred somewhere near his left foot and gazed up at him, unblinking. Kirkendall stared at the animal meditatively and withdrew a cigarette. What was it about this place that—in spite of himself—was so rich and deep? Kirkendall once again felt the urge to probe a depth here and there. Was the old man sleeping again, with his eyes open on him? He lighted the cigarette with both hands cupped stiffly before his face. Then, swimming in smoke, he looked around him with a peculiar opacity in his eyes. Something caught his attention, and he strode over the cat, and past a bookcase, and began fondling a heavy, embroidered kind of portiere that had caught his eye once the night before.

During the next March both Otto and Kirkendall lost their wives. Mrs. Flaschmann died quietly, leaving Otto wandering fitfully around the old house. Kirkendall's childless wife left him suddenly one night, and he, to fill the gap, took in a bachelor-girl friend named Stella Reeb. He took her with him on his next Eastern jaunt that summer.

It was a hot, muggy day when he swung his car down through the open gateway to the Flaschmann estate. Kirkendall saw the slight figure of Otto hovering in the garden beside the two-storey garage. He remembered Otto saying that he would trust the grounds to the gardener, but never the vegetable garden; and Mrs. Flaschmann had laughed in the possessive way women have about their men's idiosyncrasies. How was Otto making out without his Mrs.?

Kirkendall jerked the car to a nodding stop, and jumped out to open the door for Stella. She emerged, tall and straight, and gazed loftily at the approaching figure of Otto—dressed in surplus army pants and a faded blue "T" shirt. She was a flat-chested young woman of twenty-eight or nine with a gorgeous mass of jet-black hair piled high on her head. Her skin was pasty and powdery, and the contours of her face were perfect, symmetrical and unexciting. The dark glasses she wore against the sun gave her a peculiarly cadaverous expression.

"Hello, Otto," Kirkendall said solemnly and sympathetically. He grasped the old man's hand.

"Hello," Otto said, and his eyes twitched behind his glasses. There

was a slight pause while Kirkendall looked soberly into the old man's face and Otto blinked uncertainly. Finally, he said, "How are antiques?"

Kirkendall didn't answer, but introduced Stella to him. She commiserated with him briefly and they all walked to the open back porch.

Otto leaned in the back door and asked the cook to make some lemonade for the lady and get some beer for Kirkendall and himself. They sat there talking until the muggy air began to break up into leisurely currents of breeze and the tops of the high elms began to nod. There was a summer storm coming on and already the great nimbus had begun to unfold over them, low and exhilarating.

After the preliminary condolences they had avoided the talk of Mrs. Flaschmann's death. Otto and Kirkendall had talked under a facade of laziness, of antiques, the garden, politics, while Stella sat far down in her chair chain-smoking cigarettes and sipping at her lemonade. She hardly looked at the men beside her. It was Kirkendall who was yawning, not Stella. She had a kind of intensity set in her face. And, of course, Otto was rambling. But there was one thing—obvious in a way—that Otto said which shocked Kirkendall terribly. He said it right before they left, and Kirkendall was actually sick at his stomach when he got in the car. Not that the thing itself was terribly strange; it was just that Otto had said it; and with such an awful, unnatural intensity in his face and voice; and with tears swelling up viscid and refractory behind his glasses.

He said, "It's a terrible, terrible thing, Kirkendall. You'll never understand; never. I sometimes curse the arrangement of things that could make life so hateful."

And then they left. Kirkendall, agitated and driving fast, and Stella brooding and chain-smoking. Does Otto disapprove of God on moral grounds? Or does he just miss the problem by disapproving, not of God, but of "providence"? Either alternative seems to contradict Otto's nature.

The storm was a real cloudburst. The rain thudded heavily on their car, and within ten minutes the sewers were overflowing. The windshield wipers hissed and strained, and Kirkendall was slowed to second gear. Twice they had to stop until the flood of gray-green water had subsided. A half hour after the last stop they were well into the country. The stillness of the air was broken only by the sibilance of the car wheels on the wet tar road and the sound of

thunder playing with the lightning on the mountains. It was that vast, hollow dusk that succeeds the summer shower and both Kirkendall and Stella were abashed by it.

That night they stayed at a motel. Kirkendall tried to read for a while before going to bed, but he got restless and finally had to join Stella, who was sitting outside gazing beyond an advertising sign at the dark, massive body of a mountain. They sat there until eleven o'clock, silent, and watching the scud of fracto-nimbus that streaked the moon and night sky.

In the middle of the night Kirkendall dreamed of Otto. He dreamed that he was back in the freight station that he had worked in as a younger man. He recalled vividly the redolence of the place: the stale smell of the old floor, the yellow lights, the rumbling of the hand-trucks, the incessant moan of the old motor that brought the belt out of the basement and tumbled the packages down a waxed chute for the men to grab and throw. And amidst the racks of heavily piled packages and the men and the trucks—amidst all of this activity he recalled the tiny, bent figure of an old man weaving unsteadily to some incomprehensible destination. Somehow this strange old man had become Otto; but he looked much older—so ancient and fragile. His great hooked nose almost touched the chin and his eyes were bleary. It seemed that he was carrying an unbelievable burden, although he might have been just looking for the toilet. Incredibly forlorn and pathetic he wandered uncertainly among the men and massive objects that surrounded him. Even though it was Otto, it was Otto metamorphosed into the shape and looks of that other old man. There were no glasses to occlude the dreariness in those eyes. Would he be run down by a truck? Kirkendall became frantic, because the little old man was lost and helpless. He quivered and tottered against a rack when someone brushed him. They couldn't see him; or they didn't care. One was as bad as the other. The roar of the trucks became unbearable, and someone was ringing a bell and there was much shouting. Old man's drop was suspended from his nose and his bent little frame was shaking like a used-up filament.

Kirkendall couldn't stand it any longer. He left the place he was working at and struggled—tried to run—to his side. Wasn't anyone going to save him? He knew that if the old man wasn't actually in any trouble, or even not there, he would appear ridiculous, but Kirkendall couldn't restrain himself. And there were suddenly a vast number of trucks and canvas tubs in the way. Kirkendall was

beating himself against them like a moth against a light bulb. He was weeping now, and bruised. All he really wanted to do was to go up to him and say, "Hello, little father," and lead him out of this terrible, gross place. Perhaps, outside, the Mrs. might be standing—forever young and buxom—and she could lead the old man home, if he didn't disappear too soon. The tears were flooding from his face now.

In an instant he was transferred from the yellow arena of pain to the dark room. His head was buried in the pillow and his ribs were still heaving with the spasms of sobbing. He turned his head in a darting gesture to the side, and saw the thin, straight outline of Stella sitting up in bed. Although she was sitting next to him, she seemed remote and untouchable. He couldn't even hear her breathing. She was watching him.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I don't know," Kirkendall answered.

"You ought to tell me," she said.

"I know. I will. Later."

"Okay," she said. "I know how it is. Everybody has a little, hard ball of secret pain."

"That's right," Kirkendall said. "They're always so secret that you can never really talk about them."

"Poor dear!" She got out of bed. He watched her as she walked to the window and gazed out. He could see the snout of his car through the window, shining in the moonlight. She lighted a cigarette and exhaled deeply into the screen. Some bugs ticked against it uncertainly. He hoped he might be able to think more about her now; more about her mind, her soul, her heart. He hoped he would never think of Otto Flaschmann again in his whole life.

ROBERT HUTCHINSON:

Young

All that there was of green was in that summer:
The morning's sets of haze,
The race to the lake before breakfast, and mountains to praise
The small cast, the spot-lit-green ballet
That surfacing, laughing, white, released to the day
All that our hearts could raise;

And all that there was of noon in those green hours
The sun ignited—
And all day, young and noon were the themes we tried
Till sun brought out the mountain black
In us, and green called after all the way back,
And wilderness crawled inside.

In the Ward of Mercy

While I tore from the corporal's elbow
the last poor hanging shred of arm
and morning spilled apologies but stayed,

a bus gained speed from my civilian head
and moths in a jungle said
that they were human, too. Skew griefs

were interlocked there, steel flew leafward while
a child in Prague called Jesus, and Rome
came home for a drink. Only the earth to cry

for the frazzled cuff and the one loose button
one-time shell on its crusted heart
and earth shed nothing but light. Sun

went down on our midwest face, sun
was light where the arm had been: sun ordered
come away, and moths in a spiral led

us in. The civil jungle dialed us like
a minute hand; I walked an inscribed circle,
was halfway to home or more before

I saw him stretched like a ravaged Hermes and,
a thread apart, at ease, what once
paid silly praise to the sweaty face of May.

FREDERICK BOCK:

Cartoon: The Valet

1

Too bad no one fancies the valet's mien
But the poor whose better misery is to learn
Between wars the right way to pack a shirt.

Beautifully precision takes no side.
Though the dead are in his eyes, deep, deep,
And are not blind, amazement is his slum.

2

Or is not-bungling the very Ritz of complaining?
Possibly. His mother worked rose-point lace,
The candle guttered, there were cracks in the house.

Nevertheless, need we take him for a sea-wind
If pride and compassion still urge him to make
Electricity look less exact than a country man?

3

Breakfast brought, he draws the landing curtains.
His eyes look down the steps, across the parking
Colored by tallow grasses and dog-messes,

And past antennae—to what animadversion?
His drunken son comes home again a hero,
His other son has mastered a similar fission.

4

But how can we ring and tell the little fellow:
"All right, the sarcastic Novae tremble to pieces,
But the armpit's kissable abysm? Really, James—

Get out of here!" He doesn't like slugging in bed,
And we—who suffered merely the shock of green cheese
In the rich long ago—already live on the moon.

Sic Transit—

Hushed are station
Platforms—
When, with one blow, blouses
Mute the forty motions
Of summer's gong and glare.

The little droll mock
They give back to the sun
Snubs its own glamour, too,
When just a shiver shy
Of being Winter's boon.

Yet where shadows mum-show
Redskin princesses,
May not the sun protest
Cymbals of the north
In tearose underslips?

Alas, that I should hear
How suasively the lake
Repeats its gold commands—
When louder laces pleat
Abandonment!

For I must say, "Poor fish—
Have you come to mean nothing?
Sink from singing
This infernal rustling
Where better farewells fare nude."

The Jays

Before the blinded flutters of our eyes
Mind the jaybird breaks winter in two,
So quickened is the brightness
Of sun and snow about us
That we who are often lonely often use
A shimmer for repose.

We hear, above, their bluer quartz
Spoke light like a shout
Exultant in our waste of hearts—
Yet to be, bird-loose, stretched out
Beside you is enough
To make love love: we lie
Like snowbanks on our warmth.

Their cries are axis-creaks of May!
But half-turned hills of sun
Roll back to your whiteness,
In itself halcyon:
Performed before us is our quietness.

Dying, the brightest of the snows,
We feel our drifted moments vie
With local centuries passing by
That brought no jay upon the sill,
    As this hour will,
To look at you, sidewise, as we at him
    With all our power,
For still we live on where we die—
Nothing changes but the flight of birds.

VIOLA HOPKINS:

William Faulkner's 'The Hamlet': A Study in Meaning and Form

Rarely does one novel contain the abundance and variety of William Faulkner's *The Hamlet:* a range of style from lyricism to bathos; genial good humor alternating with corrosive irony; a series of episodes in which the tall tale nudges the love idyl and a fantasy in Satan's throne room goes hand in hand with a sombre murder story; a cast of characters, more numerous than the inhabitants of the hamlet, both witnessing and participating in a drama in which a shift of economic power has far-reaching sociological and moral implications.

Plenum, however, by itself is not sufficient to make a work of art; a cornucopia is not aesthetically pleasing unless the fruit has been arranged to form a unified composition of colors and shapes. Recent criticism[1] has corrected the mistake of regarding this novel merely as a collection of short stories loosely strung together "resembling beads on a string," in Malcolm Cowley's phrase, but what needs to be explored is how Faulkner has integrated his numerous motifs, moods, and styles to create a unified "composition," though not in the academic style. My purpose here is to throw some light on how meaning molds form and creates its own unity and, further, to suggest how symbolism, characterization, and humor contribute not only to thematic unity but to making *The Hamlet* a rich and dimensional major work.

Faulkner's raw material, or, in other words, the main narrative action, tells the story of the rise of Flem Snopes and his clan in Frenchman's Bend, a farm community twenty miles or so southeast of Jefferson. Ab Snopes, Flem's father, a Civil War bushwhacker and an unsuccessful horse trader reduced to tenant farming, has gained an unsavory reputation for quarreling with his landlords and then burning their barns for revenge. When the Snopeses move to Frenchman's Bend and become Will Varner's tenants, Flem uses his

[1] See Peter Lisca, *Faulkner Studies,* III (Spring, 1954), 5-13.

father's arsonist tendencies to blackmail Jody Varner into hiring him to work in the village store. From this vantage point, he soon gains control of all the other Varner industries and interests in the village, including the cotton gin, the blacksmith shop, the store, and many of the surrounding farms, installing in each of these enterprises one of his kinsmen as manager, worker, or tenant farmer. He completes the ravage of the village by marrying Eula Varner, a rural Helen of Troy, cheating most of the community in the famous "Spotted Horses" episode, and tricking three others with a buried gold legend into buying nearly worthless property; and, having sucked the community dry, he leaves his rodent-like relatives to haggle over the pickings while he moves on to Jefferson, where he is to become vice-president of the bank (in *Sartoris*).

From this *donnée,* Faulkner made four books, each self-contained in that expectations of a narrative nature are raised at the beginning and fulfilled by the end. That is, in the first book Flem's rise from a store clerk to the throne of a feudal domain is completed, signified by his being seen sitting in Will Varner's flour barrel chair on the jungle-choked lawn of the Old Frenchman's place; the second book ends with Eula's seduction and marriage, the point towards which her whole history has been directed; "The Long Summer" is taken up with two stories, Ike Snopes' affair with the cow and the Houston-Mink Snopes conflict, both of which are resolved, though not conclusively, by the end of this book; and the last book may be viewed as being made up of two individual but related tall tales, the "Spotted Horses" and hidden treasure episodes. Though each section has extrinsic interest, each is related through theme as well as common setting, characters, tone, and even a continuous stream of narrative action. Once the reader has accepted the fact that this is neither a strictly chronologically developed narrative in the realistic or naturalistic tradition of, say, Dreiser's *Sister Carrie,* nor a book in which the time has been "spatialized," to borrow Joseph Frank's term, as it has in Faulkner's earlier *As I Lay Dying, The Sound and the Fury* or *Absalom, Absalom!,* and is willing to accept it on its own terms, the "form" will be seen to be adequate to the subject. As a matter of fact, *The Hamlet* is something of a "half-breed" both "old-fashioned" and "modern" in that though the story unfolds for the most part in chronological sequence, on occasion the technique of dislocating time is employed.

Its "episodic" structure must first of all be referred to the dominant tone. Not accidentally is it entitled *The Hamlet;* we might say that its outer limits extend beyond the boundaries of Frenchman's Bend only as far as Jefferson, and the core, in the community and the novel, is Varner's crossroads store. The pace of a rural community in the 1890's is reflected in the slow, discursive movement of the novel. There is time to spend a Saturday whittling and chatting on the gallery of the village emporium. Amusements are simple and usually communal —church picnics and socials, hunting and fishing, horsetrading—but most of all, talk is the staple of entertainment. The land and the seasons are the great facts; the speech, manners, and habits of the hard-working, independent farmers determine the pitch and provide a richness of texture, a concreteness, and a fullness of life which acts as a framework to sustain the numerous sub-structures, variety of styles, and themes, which in a sparser work would seem gratuitous. It is this closeness to the "'folk" (to be discussed more fully later in connection with humor), though most difficult to define specifically, which is perhaps the key to the particular individual quality and unity of this novel, if any one "key" can be isolated. It acts strongly to define the tone and technique of the novel, just as Benjy's inability to discriminate past and present time determines the form and style of the first part of *The Sound and the Fury.*

Before, however, we consider the function and effectiveness of individual "structures," we should explore the basic moral tension, which is that between the Snopeses, led by Flem, and the farmers, represented by Ratliff. Flem is the central figure of the novel; but, paradoxically, not only are most of the other characters more fully comprehended or sharply etched, but the book seems to be centered on what happens to them. He is inevitably in the background, scarcely appearing to be taking part in the action; indeed he is "offstage" in Texas for a good quarter of the book. His personality is never presented through his thoughts or feelings, and though his jaw is in perpetual motion, relentlessly grinding his nickel's worth of tobacco, he scarcely utters a word. Though the other Snopeses are highly individuated, from the proverb-spouting, teacher-lawyer, cartoon-like I.O. to the not unsympathetically portrayed, good-humored, empty-headed Eck, Flem is always presented from the outside, usually in terms of his physical appearance. Faulkner, however, makes good use of external description to suggest the man's essentially ruthless and amoral nature, as the following passage testifies:

> If he [Flem] ever looked at them individually, that one [Ratliff] did not discern it—a thick squat man of no establishable age between twenty and thirty, with a broad still face containing a tight seam of mouth stained slightly at the corners with tobacco, and eyes the color of stagnant water, and projecting from among the other features in startling and sudden paradox, a tiny predatory nose like the beak of a small hawk. It was as though the original nose had been left off by the original designer or craftsman and the unfinished job taken over by someone of a radically different school or perhaps by some viciously maniacal humorist or perhaps by one who had had only time to clap into the center of the face a frantic and desperate warning.[2]

According to Irving Howe, Flem is, "like most pure villains, hard to accept. Each step of his behavior is credible, his character an enigma."[3] His lack of credibility as a human being, however, seems justifiable to me in terms of his role in the novel. He is in a sense an abstraction of all the evils of the individualized Snopes and does not have to be a "person" at all. Presenting him by default, as he does, Faulkner intensifies his value as an incalculable force, a shadow that falls on all the characters and lurks in the background of all incidents. He serves as an unfocused but highly effective symbol of a pervasive, corruptive power. Not having much personality beyond his meanness and cunning, he has that same "depthless quality, like stamped tin" which characterizes Popeye, his urban counterpart in *Sanctuary*. There is, of course, more than an intimation that he is soul-less. In a brilliantly comic scene which Ratliff imagines taking place in hell, Flem bargains with the Prince of Darkness for the redemption of his soul. The Prince cannot return it to him because, though it was not very big to begin with, now it is only a "dried-up smear under one edge" of a matchbox (p. 171). Like the Judge in the "Spotted Horses" trial scene, the Prince "gives up" in the face of Flem's enormous, calm audacity and resigns his throne to him, just as earlier, though less sensationally, Varner had turned over to him his earthly sovereignty.

The invasion of the Snopeses is not to be taken as a realistic portrayal of a shift in the locus of power in the community from Varner to Snopes; with the exceptions of Mink and Ab, they are drawn too much as caricatures, and their rapid peopling of the com-

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[2] William Faulkner, *The Hamlet* (New York, 1940), p. 59.
[3] Irving Howe, *William Faulkner, A Critical Study* (New York, 1952), p. 63.

munity is too sleight-of-hand to be read as a true-to-life picture. It is this two-dimensional quality which the Snopeses have, in contrast with the greater depth of the rest of the characters, which makes them the more terrifying at the same time that they are the more comic. It is in fact Flem's opaqueness and his separation from the human community, symbolized by his habitual silence in a place where talk is a favorite sedentary sport, which make his "behavior"—his ability to conceive and carry out brilliant coups—credible.

Furthermore, it seems incorrect to think of Flem simply as "pure villain." His outrageousness comes from the combination of his impenetrable blandness with his genius for manipulation. In spite of his viciousness, he inspires wonder and a perverse kind of admiration because of the imaginative quality of his cunning. He is monstrous; but like Senator Joseph McCarthy in his heyday, he arouses a baffled respect for his diabolical shrewdness, good sense of timing, and daring. Even Ratliff in the short story "Centaur in Brass" mentions Flem's name "in a tone of savage and sardonic and ungrudging admiration."[4] In terms of the over-all structure of the book, a full and more realistic presentation of Flem's personal motivations would upset the balance and economy of the book, which is based on a negative technique. Like Milton's fallen Prince, this Satan might steal the show. In that case *The Hamlet* would no longer be a kind of tragicomic allegory of the corruption of a people, but a fictional biography or realistic study of a ruthless financial and political genius.

V. K. Ratliff is the only character in the novel who acts to defeat "snopesism," though he, too, is tricked and corrupted by avarice in the end because, unlike Flem, he is thoroughly human and hence fallible. The shrewd, humorous sewing machine agent and living newspaper of Yoknapatawpha County is the Faulkner "witness" serving an interpretative function similar to that of the Reporter in *Pylon* or the neighbors in *As I Lay Dying*. Part of the story is narrated by him; part is seen through his eyes. At times he is merely an observant spectator, sometimes a participant, and we lose him completely in the long sections dealing with Eula Varner's courtship, the idiot's love affair, and Mink's quarrel with and murder of Houston. But before each of these incidents is closed, Ratliff has become involved in the action, usually in opposition to Flem Snopes. George Marion

[4] William Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner* (New York, 1950), p. 150. The sewing machine agent appears under the name Suratt.

O'Donnell's humanism-naturalism formula,[5] though it is an over simplification, seems to apply here: Ratliff is certainly the chief spokesman and defendant of an ethical, humane tradition against the invasion of the Snopeses' amoral materialism.

When the Snopes clan arrives, Frenchman's Bend is a stable, almost feudal, community with its rituals and traditions. The "peasants" are under the thumb of the not very benevolent Varners. When Varner makes his annual settlement with his tenants and debtors, he is described as the "white trader" and Snopes is his "native parrot-taught headman" (p. 69). But the headman soon surpasses his teacher in exploiting his own stock. Flem upsets the feudal order and disregards the traditions and expectations of the country folk by replacing Varner's casual, unsystematized brigandage with a calculated "cost accounting" control. When he worked in the store, Jody Varner often made mistakes, usually in his own favor, but because he gave the farmers long-term credit when they needed it, they expected him to do this. Flem does not give credit and he never makes mistakes.

> "You mean ain't nobody ever caught him *once* even?" [Ratliff asked.]
> "No," Bookwright said. "And folks don't like it. Otherwise, how can you tell?"
> "Sho," Ratliff said. "How can you?" (p. 65)

Ratliff, then, serves to unify the novel in at least two respects: in his moral opposition to snopesism and in his role as commentator. His mud-stained buckboard with his sleek "mis-matched'" team is a familiar sight on the country roads as he makes his rounds through the four neighboring counties. He weaves in and out of the novel in much the same way, joining the many strands of interest and always managing to be on the scene whenever the time is ripe for an ironical judgment on the gullibility of the farmers or the machinations of the opposition.

To understand Faulkner's method better, we might briefly examine some of the episodes or "structures" which seem but loosely related to the narrative and thematic development. The long Pat Stamper horse trading story, which hinges on the blowing up of a horse by means

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[5] See George Marion O'Donnell, "Faulkner's Mythology," *William Faulkner, Two Decades of Criticism,* ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (East Lansing, 1951), pp. 49-62.

of an inserted bicycle tube, may interrupt the narrative action; but justification, apart from its own merit, can be found for its inclusion, and in this particular place. Ratliff tells it ostensibly to show that Ab "aint naturally mean . . . . just soured" (p. 30), and Ab does indeed emerge in a different light. His meanness, his barn-burnings, and "absolutely needless violence" (p. 55) are seen to arise from despair and wounded pride as he angrily protests against his defeat. The Stamper episode, humorous as it is, was one of the first of a long line of circumstances which contributed to his defeat; but through this story the reader sees that he was once capable of affection, friendliness, and humor. In contrast, Flem appears even more depthless and inhuman, for no anecdote, human folly or passion is offered to illuminate the roots of his viciousness, except, of course, the example of Ab's failure.

Faulkner puts the episode to good use when he follows it with the scene in which, after eight years, Ratliff visits Ab. The mood changes from the genial past to the harsh present, and the colorful humor gives way to a feeling of desolation and melancholy, a variation in tone which works backward, too, throwing the humorous story into a different perspective, making it indefinably more meaningful than it is by itself.

The chicanery of the legendary Pat Stamper and his Negro companion, whose artistry in transforming broken-down mules into high-spirited animals bordered on magic, may also be viewed as a foreshadowing of the later calico horses episode in which a Snopes emerges victorious. That the latter story, no less humorous but more tragic, should be in the third person rather than the first indicates the subtlety of Faulkner's handling of these two "tall" tales. The first is retrospective and anecdotal, admittedly a story told to a circle of listeners; in the second, the "trick" has unfortunate consequences and far-reaching implications, the least difference between the two episodes being the gulling of one person as opposed to the cheating of a community.

Though the book "Eula" can be interpreted quite easily, simply in terms of the narrative structure, there is an ambiguity in the treatment of the central character which has many ramifications. The main "point" of Eula's story is that Flem has appropriated this splendid female animal, who has aroused wild hopes, dreams and passions in every male in the village from thirteen to ninety, as part of a lucrative business deal. Seduced and then deserted by one of her numerous

suitors, she is given to Flem by her father, who also pays for the two-dollar marriage licence and the train tickets for the "'honeymoon" to Texas (where she is to bear the child of her lover) and turns over to him the Old Frenchman's property with a substantial sum of money. Of course, Flem has official title to her, but to her he is nothing. She calls him "the man" or "sometimes she said Mr Snopes, saying it exactly as she would have said Mr Dog" (p. 167).

In contrast to Flem's cold acquisitiveness, there is the passion of the school teacher Labove, who, according to Faulkner, would have been a monk in another age, "a militant fanatic who would have turned his uncompromising back upon the world with actual joy and gone to a desert and passed the rest of his days and nights calmly and without an instant's self-doubt battling . . . his own fierce and unappeasable natural appetites" (p. 119). He turns his back on the world outside Frenchman's Bend and remains in the village because of "an eleven year old girl who, even while sitting with veiled eyes against the sun like a cat on the school steps at recess and eating a cold potato, postulated that ungirdled quality of the very goddesses in his Homer and Thucydides: of being at once corrupt and immaculate, at once virgins and the mothers of warriors and of grown men" (p. 128).

As this description of Eula suggests, she is presented from differing and sometimes unreconciled points of view. First there is the effort to identify her with woman incarnate, as Eve or Venus, the principle of fecundity itself. When Labove first sees her entering the classroom, he feels she brings "into the bleak, ill-lighted, poorly-heated room dedicated to the harsh functioning of Protestant primary education a moist blast of spring's liquorish corruption, a pagan triumphal prostration before the supreme primal uterus" (p. 129). Later he identifies her with the earth: "He saw it: the fine land rich and fecund and foul and eternal and impervious to him who claimed title to it, oblivious, drawing to itself tenfold the quantity of living seed its owner's whole life could have secreted and compounded, producing a thousandfold the harvest he could ever hope to gather and save" (p. 135).

On one level, then, Eula symbolizes the life-giving principle on a grand scale. Elevated through repeated associations with pagan mythology, she comes to represent an elemental magnificence and grandeur. Her presence arouses bright dreams and passions; she lifts the little lost village from its obscurity and bondage to time by her kinship with the immortals—Venus, Helen, Ceres. But on the other hand

this image of a goddess is contradicted by the comically mammalian Eula forever chewing cold sweet potatoes, too lazy to do anything but sit and wait for her glands to grow. Nothing splendid in that picture! The gap between the two characterizations is bridged by the emphasis on her pure animality which is summarized by a remark made by the dry, spare, eternal bachelor Ratliff: after all she is "just meat" and "only another mortal natural enemy of the masculine race" (p. 171). Eula may be a goddess, but she, like them, is "corrupt" as well as "immaculate"—a purely physical force which destroys man's freedom and enslaves his spirit while she herself remains inviolable.

The association of the female with the land as the procreative force which condemns man to servitude is a pattern which recurs throughout the novel. Thus, Labove, though he already had "forty miles of start toward freedom and (he knew it, said it) dignity and self-respect" (p. 128), against his conscious will is "doomed" to return to the village because of Eula. Similarly, Houston cannot escape marriage to Lucy Pate. Though he flees "not from his past, but to escape his future" (p. 242), he learns after twelve years that he cannot escape either. The pattern is repeated in Mink Snopes' capitulation to the nymphomaniac in the convict lumber camp. "Even before his summons came, he was resigned to the jealousy and cognizant of his fate" (p. 272). Similarly, the land itself is a shackle which neither Houston nor Mink can free themselves from. Both flee, but both must return. Mink seeks the sea, "that iodinic proffer of space and oblivion," but he has "no intention of availing himself, would never avail himself" (p. 270) of it. Thus, this pattern of escape and return and of the land and women as life-giving and domesticating forces can be viewed as a symbolic projection of one of the conditions of human existence, the eternal struggle of the flesh against the spirit and the free will against fate. It is in this respect that the characterization of Eula has a significance, with respect to the book as a whole, that goes beyond the social and narrative levels to the ideological.

The idiot, Ike Snopes, plays a part in the ethical tension of the novel at several points which also makes him transcend his role in the plot. Early in Book I, when Ratliff confronts Flem in the store with the notes he has received from Mink, he is utterly sickened to learn of the Snopeses' exploitation of Ike, Flem's ward. Another dictum in the code of human decency has been violated because it is clear that to Flem the bonds of kinship mean nothing. Blood is *not* blood. In Ratliff's own words:

> I quit too soon. I went as far as one Snopes will set fire to another Snopeses barn and both Snopeses know it, and that was all right. But I stopped there. I never went on to where that first Snopes will turn around and stomp the fire out so he can sue that second Snopes for the reward and both Snopeses know that too. (p. 101)

The long section in Book III in which Ike pursues and escapes with Houston's cow (another example of the escape and return pattern in that section but worked out in quite a different way) is perhaps no less directly relevant to the thematic structure than the episode just mentioned, but its length and its rhapsodic style have caused some critics to feel that here Faulkner is allowing his love of language to get out of control. But first, the significance of the idiot ought to be suggested. To Ratliff, his eyes appear as if "at some instant, some second once, [they] had opened upon, been vouchsafed a glimpse of, the Gorgon-face of that primal injustice which man was not intended to look at face to face and had been blasted empty and clean forever of any thought" (p. 98). His slobbering mouth is capable of forming only one distorted word, "Ike H-mope," his own name, yet he loves and suffers. Vacant of thought and lacking the instinctive physical coordination of an animal, he emerges ironically enough through this section, because of his love for a cow, as more human than Flem Snopes or, for that matter, any others of the clan. Like Benjy, he is innocent and incorruptible.

Ike is the only Snopes, with the exception of Mink, whose point of view controls the narrative for any length of time, but unlike Faulkner's use of Benjy in the first section of *The Sound and the Fury,* the point of view of the idiot here is not sustained but shifts from a vision of a world of alternating darkness and light and a swooning, unstable earth to that of the impersonal author's, especially in passages where other characters, mainly Houston or Mrs. Littlejohn, are involved in the idiot's adventure. Since Ike is only one rung above the animals on the great chain of being, the natural world is revealed through his consciousness from a fresh and unusual perspective, for to him it is granted to see natural phenomena undistorted by thought or memory or preconceived ideas and images. Thus, in contrast to the colloquial, down-to-earth style of much of the rest of the novel, this section is highly poetic in language and feeling. The poetic treatment raises the episode above the realistic level, transforming perversion into something pure and idyllic.

While the lyricism of this section has often been cited, what has

not been pointed out is the occasional note of burlesque, resembling the "Sweets of Sin" parody in the Gertie MacDowell scene in *Ulysses,* which saves it from dwindling into sentimentality. For example, after the cow has released her "fear constricted bowels" on her "lover," she scrambles away with the besotted Ike in hot pursuit. He speaks to her, "trying to tell her how this violent violation of her maiden's delicacy is no shame, since such is the very iron imperishable warp of the fabric of love" (p. 199). The lyricism may serve to spiritualize the "love affair," but the occasional ironical tone brings it back to earth and provides a distance or perspective from which to view the scene.

The aftermath of this episode also serves a function in revealing character and measuring the extent to which the Snopeses have demoralized the community. Houston, Mrs. Littlejohn, and Ratliff are sensitive to the idiot's shame and grief, and each of them acts to alleviate his pain. Houston, filled with "that furious exasperation which was not rage but savage contempt and pity for all blind flesh capable of hope and grief" (p. 215), gives Ike the cow. Mrs. Littlejohn, realizing that this cow is the only thing Ike has ever wanted, wants him to have it despite the abnormality of the relationship. Ratliff acts to have the cow taken away from the boy because his sense of "conscience" forces him to do so. He is not, perhaps, as outraged by the act itself as sickened by the men, of whom he is one, who have succumbed to the corruption of snopesism or remained passive to it. Ike's act becomes a perversion only when he is put on exhibition by his kinsman, Eck, because Ike is not entirely a human being, capable of making moral judgments. The men of the community are. Ratliff shuts up the hole in the fence and has the cow taken away because he feels he must take a stand against evil, for one of the conditions of humanity, Faulkner makes clear, is conscience as well as passion, greed, and bloodthirstiness.

The parallel patterns of escape and return and struggle against fate in the Mink Snopes-Houston stories, which occupy the rest of Book III, were suggested earlier in connection with the discussion of Eula. What is of special interest here is Faulkner's use of biography for psychological, rather than purely informational, purposes.[6] This is illustrated in the juxtaposition of the story of Houston's past with

[6] I am indebted to Kenneth Burke's essay "Psychology and Form," *Critiques and Essays in Criticism,* ed. R. W. Stallman (New York, 1949), for this distinction and conception of form.

his murder by Mink in the present. The tone of the passage in which Houston's married life is set forth is tender, quiet and understated. This is followed by a passage in which he is shown trying to cope with his lacerating grief at his wife's death. The murder comes with an abruptness that is beautifully timed in bringing relief, terrible as it is, to the reader after his sustained identification with the painfulness of Houston's suffering. The pity that has been aroused is released just as Houston himself is severed from his anguish. Since mere description cannot convey the effect, this passage is worth quoting at length, though reproduction of the transitional passage alone makes it seem more melodramatic than it actually is when taken in the context of the whole chapter.

> But sooner or later the moon would wax again. There would be nights which were almost blank ones. Yet sooner or later that silver and blanched rectangle of window would fall once more, while night waxed into night then waned from night, as it had used to fall across the two of them while they observed the old country belief that the full moon of April guaranteed the fertilising act. But now there was no body beside his own for the moon to fall upon, and nothing for another body to have lain beside his own upon. Because the cot was too narrow for that and there was only the abrupt downward sheer of inky shadow in which only the invisible hound slept, and he would lie rigid, indomitable, and panting. "I dont understand it," he would say. "I dont know why. I wont ever know why. But You cant beat me. I am as strong as You are. You cant beat me."
>
> He was still alive when he left the saddle. He had heard the shot, then an instant later he knew he must have felt the blow before he heard it. Then the orderly sequence of time as he had known it for thirty-three years became inverted. (pp. 248-249)

Mink's murder of Houston and his subsequent attempt to escape are also related to the theme of intra-Snopes depredation and, finally, to Flem Snopes. The murder acts to differentiate character in the same way that the Ike Snopes episode did. Mink has all the characteristics of a Snopes, but he is more like Ab than like Flem. He kills Houston ostensibly because he impounded his cow but really to maintain his sense of integrity in the face of poverty and defeat just as Ab burned barns. Lump, Flem's successor at the store, not only refuses to help Mink but actually hinders his escape because of the money that he knows to have been in Houston's pocket. He cannot forgive Mink for not picking his pockets before disposing of the body. " 'Do

you mean to tell me you never even looked? *never even looked?'"* (p. 268). When Mink is to be sent to the penitentiary for life, Flem violates the most fundamental obligation of the blood relationship by doing nothing though he could have acted to ameliorate the sentence. It is Ratliff who looks after Mink's wife and children while he awaits trial in the Jefferson jail.

The last book, "The Peasants," could be subtitled "Flem Snopes' Mopping-Up Operations," for the action of Book I is continued here and brought to a climax. Having returned from Texas with a string of wild horses, Flem is prepared to put through his biggest business deal to date; the sale of the spotted horses is the crowning achievement of his career in Frenchman's Bend. Underlying the humor, and inextricably a part of it, are the violence, pain, and injustice which are the inevitable results of a completely successful "practical" joke. Mrs. Tull talks away her only means of redress for her grievances, and Mrs. Armstid's claim for her five dollars is overruled by the sworn testimony of Lump Snopes. Henry Armstid goes completely mad as he compulsively digs for non-existent gold on the worthless property he has mortgaged his farm to buy. And, of course, no one can prove that Flem owned the horses though everyone knows he did, nor can Bookwright, Ratliff, and Armstid convict him of fraud. In terms of the ethical tension of the novel, corruption has triumphed over rational morality. Having duped all of the men of the countryside except Ratliff (and Tull!) into buying a calico horse, Flem tricked him into buying the worthless Frenchman's property by playing on his very human greediness and love for the "science and pastime of skullduggery" (p. 94). Flem may not have designed to cheat Ratliff specifically. Anyone willing to be caught would have satisfied him. But Flem has the Prince of Darkness on his side so that it *has* to be Ratliff who falls into the trap. He is fated to be caught just as Labove must return to the village and Houston must marry Lucy Pate.

Important to the thematic organization of the novel are a number of contrasts and parallels which have been touched on before but not developed. Ike's passion for the goddess cow ironically balances Flem's loveless marriage to Eula, the fertility goddess, who is mammalian and placidly bovine. The idiot, however, successfully abducts the cow, even though he loses her after their brief "affair." Flem acquires Eula permanently, but she never belongs to him. She is, in relation to Flem, as wooden as the toy cow, an effigy of his real one, that was given to Ike. Also, the tone of serenity and devotion which pervades the

passages in which Houston's marriage is described contrasts not only with the aridity of Flem and Eula's relationship, but also with the passionate but ghost-ridden love Mink bears for his wife.

Nature symbolism is an important means by which the humanistic-naturalistic conflict is projected. The farmers have a respectful but easy familiarity with trees, birds, and weather. In their sane moments, as for example in the following passage when the subdued men are escorting Varner to the Littlejohn's to examine the injured Henry Armstid, they are responsive to their natural environment.

> They moved on to the gate and into the road again. "Well, it's a good bright cool night for running them." The moon was now high overhead, a pearled and mazy yawn in the soft sky, the ultimate ends of which rolled onward, whorl on whorl, beyond the pale stars and by pale stars surrounded. They walked in a close clump, tramping their shadows into the road's mild dust, blotting the shadows of the burgeoning trees which soared, trunk branch and twig against the pale sky, delicate and finely thinned. They passed the dark store. Then the pear tree came in sight. It rose in mazed and silver immobility like exploding snow; the mockingbird still sang in it. "Look at that tree," Varner said. "It ought to make this year, sho." (p. 350)

During the heat and tumult of the horse auction and its aftermath, there were refreshing glimpses of the same pear tree in "full and frosty bloom" (p. 316), its serene beauty mocking the human comedy taking place on the vacant lot. The blooming plant or tree is frequently associated with the humane in other ways: Ratliff after a long illness is described as "thin . . . the smooth brown of his face not pallid but merely a few shades lighter, cleaner looking; emanating in fact a sort of delicate robustness like some hardy odorless infrequent woodland plant blooming into the actual heel of winter's snow" (p. 78).

The Snopeses, on the other hand, rather than being in sympathetic harmony with the natural world, are presented as a sub-human species who merge with the "lower" orders. Flem is "froglike" and has the "predatory nose" of a hawk (p. 59). There is a hint of the snake about him, too, in that he wears rubber-soled tennis shoes which muffle the sound of his footsteps, and his squatness is emphasized. Even his name "Flem" has the unpleasant meaning of "mucus" and suggests something sluggish and oozing. In combination, we are given the impression of a heavy-bodied, full-bellied reptile creeping silently in the dust, an image which is in keeping with his identification with Satan.

Flem is "heeled by a dog," Lump, who has the "bright, alert, amoral eyes of a squirrel or a chipmunk" (p. 165). Ratliff calls him that "Snopes encore" and tells how he was so ashamed and horrified by his given name "Launcelot" that he gladly accepted "Lump" in its place (pp. 225-226). The slippery, rodent-faced I.O. has the "weasel-like quality of existing independent of his clothing" (p. 73). Eck is not referred to in animal terms, perhaps because he is good-natured and likeable, even if he is a Snopes, but he is also definitely sub-human. His "open, equable face" begins "less than an inch below his hairline" (p. 71). Since he apparently does not have enough room for his brains to mobilize the nerves even for muscular activities, he is clumsy and incompetent at tasks which require nothing but brute strength and minimal dexterity.

To complete the menagerie: Eck's son, Wallstreet Panic, has "periwinkle" eyes; Saint Elmo, the candy gorger, is compared to a rat, and the idiot is bovine. Mink's given name places him without a doubt in this zoo. Ab's two girls are at first likened to "two enormous birds . . . the last survivors of a lost species" and then to two "tremendous cows" (p. 54). The Snopeses as a whole resemble locusts in their ravage of the village.

Cleanliness is also used as an index to character though it cannot be applied too rigidly. Ratliff, Bookwright, Tull and the other farmers wear "perfectly clean" or "absolutely clean" faded and darned shirts and overalls. This is stressed as if to suggest that there is something to the old adage that "cleanliness" is next to "godliness." In contrast, Flem's new white shirt is streaked with dust on Monday and becomes progressively dirtier as the week passes. Lump appears in the hamlet wearing the same kind of dirty white shirt and dingy gray trousers. Jody's ceremonial black broadcloth suit and collarless white shirt, which he wears all year round, are soiled and unpressed. Ab Snopes wears a black frock coat, green with age.

Though *The Hamlet* is admittedly discursive in plot development, this does not mean that the incidents have not been skilfully worked out and arranged even in terms of plot relationships. For example, when the novel first opens, the reader learns that Will Varner sits on the lawn of the gutted shell of the Frenchman's mansion to get an idea of how it must feel to need all that "just to eat and sleep in" (p. 7). The first book concludes with the picture of Flem sitting in the flour barrel throne. Varner, in the first part, tells Ratliff that this property is the only thing he ever bought that he could not sell to

anyone. Ratliff is thereby convinced of its value; his faith in Varner's shrewdness is so deep that he never doubts that "Uncle Will" has deliberately not sold it because the land has secret assets. This makes it plausible that Ratliff should fall prey to Flem's trick in the last book, for he is prepared to believe that treasure has been buried there, and the reader has known the basis for his assumption from the first.[7] There is symmetry, then, since the novel begins at the site of the mansion and ends with Flem Snopes, having purposely detoured to see Henry Armstid digging for gold, riding past it on his way to Jefferson. The pride and dream of the Frenchman was "dust with the lost dust of his anonymous bones" (p. 4) even before Flem's ownership. But Flem exploits the last trace of the Frenchman's legend, which had been reduced to the stubborn tale of buried money, before he leaves for Jefferson.

Another example of careful, if not "tight," plot construction is the handling of the Houston-Mink Snopes story. Houston and his handsome thoroughbred dog are introduced early in the first book. Shortly after his first visit to the new blacksmith's shop, he and Mink quarrel about Mink's yearling which trespassed on his land. Ratliff, witnessing the argument, observes that here is a different kind of Snopes, "like a cotton-mouth is a different kind of snake" (p. 104). In the first part of "The Long Summer" the quarrel comes to a head. The result of the hearing in the village store is that Mink must pay Houston three dollars for the return of his cow. This leads to the shooting, which takes place in the middle of the same section. Ironically, in the preceding chapter, Houston had given his own cow to Ike Snopes. In the last section of this third book, Mink's background is given. Ratliff's prognostication that he is different from the rest is fulfilled. In Snopes' final flight, Houston's faithful hound becomes almost mythical, an avenging hound of hell, as he pursues the murderer down the old log road.

That Labove has left his teaching job abruptly is mentioned in Book I though he actually does so in Book II. He foresees Eula's marriage to a "crippled Vulcan." Ratliff's fear, hinted at throughout the latter part of Book III and Book IV, that Flem will not come to Mink's aid, is realized in the courtroom scene, which follows the hearings against the Snopeses after the "Spotted Horses" episode. In

[7] Irving Howe seems to have overlooked this preparation for Ratliff's gullibility when he cited this incident as inconsistent with Ratliff's character.

all three cases, Flem's absence is more significant than his presence could possibly be. It can be seen from these examples that seemingly disparate incidents are both logically connected and thematically related. These violations of strict chronology and the cross references serve, moreover, to give a sense of immediateness and verisimilitude.

Humor, of all qualities the most difficult to define and most liable to suffer by abstraction from its context, is the blood and bones of *The Hamlet*. The spectacularly humorous incidents, the Pat Stamper-Ab Snopes horse swapping, the dialogue in which Flem Snopes worsts the devil, are not merely exceptional excursions from the sober main line of the narrative. The very backbone of the book, the author's voice, or call it his style or his individuality, is an ironically humorous view of life which supports every incident and gives each a function in the body proper.

Within the novel, humor is the means by which the characters find it possible to face the terror and pain of living. Ratliff has the "nicest" sense of humor coupled with the most acute sense of morality. He is utterly baffled into silence on one occasion by the enormity of one of Flem Snopes' offenses, but he usually releases his outrage through a humorously vocal appraisal of the situation. Similarly, Houston's "sardonic humor" is "indomitable and unconquerable above even the ruthless grief" (p. 216). The one who is the least discomfited by the Snopeses is Will Varner, who is "shrewd secret and merry, of a Rabelaisian turn of mind" (p. 6).

Not only does a sense of humor provide a defence mechanism or safety valve for the characters who face the harsh facts of life, but Faulkner implies that life itself is a horrifying and even senseless joke. Varner, "not frowning but with a sort of fierce risibility," remarks to Ratliff, as they walk over to Mrs. Littlejohn's where Henry Armstid writhes in pain, "Breathing is a sight-draft dated yesterday" (p. 353). Though this idea ("life on borrowed time") is a commonplace, the remark, coming as it does from Varner, sane and illusionless, Ratliff's spiritual father,[8] is significant. It makes explicit what is demonstrated by the disposition of characters and conflicts in the novel. Life at best is a precarious business. The God who determines man's

[8] There is no doubt that Faulkner meant to suggest this surrogate father-son relationship. Ratliff "was a good deal nearer his [Varner's] son in spirit and intellect and physical appearance too than any of his own get" (p. 180).

destiny is, to use Houston's words, a "prime maniacal Risibility" (p. 215). As Robert Penn Warren noted, "Distortions of humor and distortions of horror in Faulkner's work are often closely akin and frequently, in a given instance, can scarcely be disentangled."[9]

Though the philosophical implications of Faulkner's humor transcend national boundaries, the extravagance of his humor belongs to a peculiarly American tradition. The indebtedness of *The Hamlet* to the tall tale and Western humor in general has often been pointed out. What has not been recognized is his reliance on a familiar formula of frontier humor, that of the shrewd bargainer out-tricked by those he has set out to cheat.

The hoax is of course not an invention of the American backwoods, but the hoax with a hyperbolic quality is characteristically American: Mark Twain's jumping frog story is a good example of the inflated practical joke told with a dead-pan exaggeration. Similarly the suspense of the short stories "Centaur in Brass" and "Shingles for the Lord" depends on the tricking of the trickster. In *The Hamlet* this is carried out to an extreme length. Jody Varner learns about Ab Snopes' part in the burning of the Harris barn after he has promised to rent his land to Ab. At first Jody plans to take advantage of this information to force Ab to leave the farm once the corn has been raised. When he learns from Ratliff that Ab has been involved in a second barn burning, he is so terror-stricken that he readily agrees to Flem's proposition. He rationalizes Flem's salary by considering it fire insurance. Through this initial toehold, as we have noted before, Flem gains control of the village and most of the Varner interests. Ratliff, perceiving the irony of this, imagines Jody saying to Flem when Snopeses start popping up all over the place:

> "I want to make one pure and simple demand of you and I want a pure and simple Yes and No for a answer: How many more is there? How much longer is this going on? Just what is it going to cost me to protect one goddam barn full of hay?" (p. 76)

Angered and sickened by the discovery of Flem's exploitation of the idiot, Ratliff sends a cryptic message to Will Varner: "It ain't been proved yet" (p. 101). He is referring, of course, to Ab's barn burnings. One phase of the hoax is resolved with Flem's superseding Jody. A

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[9] Robert Penn Warren, "William Faulkner," *William Faulkner, Two Decades of Criticism*, p. 93.

second phase begins when Ratliff outwits Flem in the goat deal in Book I though his victory turns out to be Pyrrhic. The final turnabout is Flem's triumph over Ratliff by tricking him into buying the worthless Frenchman's property with his half-interest in a Jefferson restaurant. Though the "joke" is on Jody and Ratliff, the entire hamlet suffers from its repercussions.

According to Constance Rourke, backwoods humor was broad, grotesque or macabre while the humor of the Yankee was in a lower key, ironic and pervasive rather than exaggerated and explicit. Parts of the "Eula" book belong to the broadly comic tradition. The inflated quality of the prose style is the expression of an extravagantly humorous attitude rather than, as it has been interpreted, simply another example of the "fulsomeness" of Faulkner's style.[10] The picture of Eula so lazy that "she grew from infancy to the age of eight in chairs, moving from one to another about the house as the exigencies of sweeping and cleaning house and eating meals forced her to break cover" (p. 108) is a comic improvisation verging on the frontier "boast" or lie. Since Eula declined to walk to school, Jody had to carry her there and back on his horse. Jody's vision of himself transporting "not only across the village's horizon but across the embracing proscenium of the entire inhabited world like the sun itself, a kaleidoscopic convolution of mammalian ellipses" (p. 113) is another hyperbole in this vein. Faulkner's transmutation of the common country barnyard joke to Ike's almost mystical passion for the cow is equally fantastic. Similarly, the Snopeses are individually wildly comic, and there is something both terrifying and ridiculous in their ubiquity. The "Spotted Horses" scene with its disastrous consequences and the Pat Stamper episode with its comic-painful note fall in that area of the grotesque, being both terrible and laughable.

Hyperbole, grotesque even monstrous jokes, and tall tales are all characteristics of frontier humor which Faulkner has adapted, whether consciously or not does not matter, for his own purposes. The "gamecock of the wilderness" boast has been translated into a generalized humorous extravagance. The identification of men with animals ("I am half-horse, half-alligator") used as it was on the frontier as a boast of prowess becomes in Faulkner a means of suggesting the omnivor-

[10] This supports Warren Beck's assertion that Faulkner's style is remarkably flexible and experimental and that there are various Faulkner "styles," not just one notoriously obvious one. See Warren Beck, "William Faulkner's Style," *William Faulkner, Two Decades of Criticism,* pp. 147-164.

ousness of his sub-human creations, the Snopeses.

In his role as the ethical, rational commentator, the Yankee-like Ratliff provides the quiet, ironical humor which counterpoints the extravagance of the tall tales and the realism of the Mink Snopes section. He is a genial story teller and eye witness who makes it possible for the reader to accept the plausibility of the story and still enjoy its essential absurdity. The extravagant situations and exuberant tone of much of the novel are tempered by Ratliff's habitual understatement and deceivingly mild irony.

The concrete, inventive, humorous language in parts of *The Hamlet* can be related to the tradition of racy folk speech on the frontier. In the Pat Stamper story, told in the first person by Ratliff, Faulkner captures the vivid, concrete quality of his talk. The wagon drawn by the unmated mules went "swurging up that hill and into the Square like a roach up a drainpipe" (p. 44). To borrow a span of mules from Old Man Ans was like "going up to a rattlesnake and borrowing a rattle" (p. 51). In his trade, Ab had "walked out into what he thought was a spring branch and then found out it was quicksand" (p. 42).

The "Spotted Horses" episode, as was noted before, is told from an omniscient author's point of view which allows Faulkner greater flexibility in projecting the significance of the episode in thematic and narrative terms. But he has not lost the quality of folk speech. For example, Ratliff's speech is intellectualized, especially when it is compared with his narration of the Stamper episode. " 'What a opportunity for that Snopes family lawyer this would a been, [he remarks about I.O.] What's his name? that quick-fatherer, the Moses with his mouth full of mottoes and his coat-tail full of already halfgrown retroactive sons?' " (p. 368). This is in Ratliff's own idiom, but the language has been modified to meet the exigencies of the point of view and over-all tone of the section. By which no more is indicated than what one would expect: Faulkner exploits the raw materials of language, in this case in a folk tradition, for the artistic effect he wishes to achieve.

Similarly, Faulkner has converted the raw materials of theme, plot, character and humor into a "made" work of art. To be sure, the form does not satisfy the requirements of the Jamesian ideal and tradition. But to seek a perfectly symmetrical unity in *The Hamlet,* as I have tried to suggest in this study, is to embark on a futile quest, one on which, worst of all, the seeker is made impervious to the depths and intricacies of the Faulknerian pattern.

WALLACE FOWLIE:

Pétrus Borel

ENID STARKIE: *Pétrus Borel, the Lycanthrope: His Life and Times.* New Directions.

Pétrus Borel is known to students of French literature largely through Baudelaire's short article on him, printed in the collection of prose pieces, *L'Art Romantique*. When Baudelaire wrote this article, in 1859, Borel's name was used by journalists to express their scorn and distaste for the macabre type of Romantic poetry and for the type of flamboyant genius characterized by excesses of bohemianism and excessive affectation. Baudelaire, who revered Borel and felt strong sympathy for him, explained the aptness of the name "Lycanthrope," associated with Borel. This "wolf-man" or "werewolf" behaved as a man demonized and living in the dark forests of melancholy. He exemplified a favorite word of Baudelaire, *le guignon,* which signifies that kind of evil fate which pursues a man and from which he is unable to recover. *Le Guignon* is a goddess possessing, more than any pope or lama, the privilege of infallibility. Baudelaire explains by *le guignon* the irreconcilables in the life of Borel, the genius of the poet in the preface poem of *Madame Putiphar,* and the epic skill of the writer in several scenes of this novel, and the endless difficulties and hardships he encountered throughout his life.

No theory is proposed by Baudelaire to explain the number of *guignons* in the career of Pétrus Borel. He merely hints at the symptoms of morbidity in the man's nature which maintained and even nurtured flagrant contradictions. Signs of psychic disturbance were evident even in Borel's handwriting, in his spelling, in the agony which the writing of the simplest letter caused him. The Romantic movement in France would not have been complete without the "Lycanthropy" of Pétrus Borel. Baudelaire distinguishes between the early phase of Romanticism when the imagination of the poets was concerned with the past, with nostalgia and regret, and the second phase, more active and violent and earthy. Borel was one of the most picturesque and vehement characters of this second phase. He incarnated the spirit of the *Bousingos* in his attire and in his hate for the king and the bourgeoisie. During the years 1830-1835, when he was most famous and influential, he expressed his approval of the emphasis on excessive color and form in literature and art, and he sympathized with the dandy's creed, with the Byronic pessimism and dilettantism of an entire generation which, paradoxically, was both turbulent and bored.

Dr. Enid Starkie's study of Borel is a companion volume to her important studies of Baudelaire and Rimbaud. It is an illuminating, carefully documented biography of Borel and a history of his times. She expresses throughout her book a sympathy for Borel which is quite reminiscent of Baudelaire's. She explains, in far greater detail than Baudelaire, the failures of the man, his ambitions, his awkwardness in human relationships, his *génie manqué,* his love

for literature, his belief in himself as a writer and in the writer's vocation. Miss Starkie does not fail to describe the dignity and nobility of Borel, traits which were often overshadowed by eccentricities, mannerisms, fits of depression and violence. The criticism and evaluation she makes of Borel's writings are the most extensive yet to appear in English.

Miss Starkie discusses in some detail especially two works of Borel. *Champavert,* published in 1833, she considers his most important work and his most original. The book is made up of five tales and two autobiographical sketches, the second of which is "Champavert le Lycanthrope," the writer's own account of his life. The tales are not immoral, as was alleged at the time, but they are tales of horror, with elements of sadism, that would illustrate André Breton's famous category of *l'humour noire. Madame Putiphar* was written in Le Baizil, a small village in Champagne, where Borel lived in a wooden shack, in extreme poverty and solitude. The book describes almost every kind of horror and cruelty. When it appeared, in 1839, it passed almost unnoticed. One critic, Janin, compared Borel to the Marquis de Sade, which was an unjustified comparison but which pleased Borel. The verse prologue to the novel was greatly admired by Baudelaire and influenced him.

Fully half of Miss Starkie's book on Borel is devoted to the writer's background, to a history of the times and especially to the literary and artistic movements between 1827 and 1835. *Le Petit Cénacle* emerged in 1827: a group of ten or twelve poets and artists, headed by Pétrus Borel, who undertook a fight against classicism in French art and letters. Théophile Gautier and Gérard de Nerval are today the best known figures of *Le Petit Cénacle,* but at the time, Borel himself best represented the new spirit of poetry. He amazed and amused the group with his stories and his paradoxes, in much the same way that Baudelaire was to shock his contemporaries a bit later. Victor Hugo turned to Borel to help him form a *claque* for the première of *Hernani* in 1830. For this momentous occasion, which is admirably described by Enid Starkie, Borel organized a group of one hundred students from the Latin Quarter and taught them the passages of the text where they should express themselves vocally.

The story of Borel's rise to fame and the decline of his reputation transpires within just a few years, but they were colorful and violent years in French history. The July Revolution of 1830, the cholera of 1832 which exterminated 20,000 Parisians, the carnival of 1832 when all of Paris was turned into a bacchanalia, are evoked by Miss Starkie. She describes Philippe Musard, the celebrated conductor of the dance orchestra at the *Variétés,* a grotesque little man, believed to be possessed by the Devil. Borel was also an important leader of *Les Jeunes-France,* made up of members of *Le Petit Cénacle,* who used this new name to indicate that they were the youngest and most adventurous opponents of Louis-Philippe. They finally adopted the name of *Bousingos* (from *bousin,* meaning a noise). But Borel's supremacy was being questioned by 1835. At that time, Gautier broke away from the *Bousingos* and founded his own circle in the Impasse du Doyenné, near the Palais Royal. The new group, referred to as *La Bohême du Doyenné,* included Delacroix, Corot, Chasseriau. A house-warming party at Gautier's, in November, 1835, marked the end of Borel's influence, and the end, according to Miss Starkie, "of the charnel-house phase in French literature."

SHERMAN PAUL:

"Man's Perennial Depth Interests"

PHILIP WHEELWRIGHT: *The Burning Fountain: A Study in the Language of Symbolism.* Indiana University Press.

"A universe of infinite semantic possibility," of "semantic plenitude"—this is what Mr. Wheelwright, philosopher and literary critic, wants to reclaim for our time. He is not arguing merely for metaphoric, symbolic and mythic expression, as some new critics pleased with verbal puzzles do; he is trying to relate these kinds of expression, that is, poetry, to the religious experience that underlies the mythopoeic imagination. His interest in studying the language of symbolism is in the kind of expression that "pierces into the depths of the heart, and mounts upwards to the dwellings of the gods." It is for this reason, I think, that he is fascinated by the symbols of the *trinacria* and the cosmic fire, and that he has chosen *Oedipus Tyrannus,* the *Oresteia* and Eliot's *Four Quartets* ("the most fully pertinent single poem in our moment in history") for his most thorough explication. These symbols show the mythopoeic imagination at work, and these essentially religious works of art represent for him the full expression of man—the possibilities of *expressive* or *depth* language as contrasted with the *steno*-language, the literal language of science.

Everyone interested in poetry—indeed, everyone interested in experience—should welcome Mr. Wheelwright's quietly impassioned defense of an open universe of meaning, and his tolerant demand that the language of science and the language of poetry live and let live. The central intent of his book is not this, however, but to establish a level of meaning (a kind of seeing and a kind of experience) higher than that of logical discourse. Although he chooses to analyze only the language of science, science itself hovers in the background; and the victory he prepares for the language of poetry is a victory for that kind of apprehension of the universe that can only be called religious. When he says that expressive language is *fuller* or has *depth* this is what he means. If the language of science is utilitarian, a language of phenomena, the language of poetry is human, a language of phenomena *and* noumena. This transcendental level of language is, of course, most important to Mr. Wheelwright because it widens and deepens our universe, and because it represents man's reaching beyond to a reality without credentials in our time.

Reading this long, finely organized and logically acute study, however, forces one to give the enemy his due. How difficult it is in our time to talk about, much less affirm, a "spiritual" level. How sad it is that we no longer have the sensibility of the seventeenth century and have to use (and be taught to use) the perspectives of poetry to see our universe. Not that any amount of exegesis of archetypal symbols will ever accustom us to see mythopoeically. And to relearn that way of seeing is fraught with difficulties and followed by excruciating methodological problems and doubts, as the writers of our own Transcendental period discovered. For it is not enough to affirm a spiritual level, as Mr. Wheelwright knows; one has the heavy burden of proving it

meaningful, of showing that man's spiritual (poetic) expression intends a reality, and is not, as the logical positivists once too glibly assumed, an emotion without an object. This is Mr. Wheelwright's major objective; and his work is defined almost entirely by the terms in which the early I. A. Richards set forth the canon of semantic positivism. Now, if Mr. Wheelwright cannot give us the reality that poetry intends with any more certainty (positivistic certainty) than others who have tried to maintain the cognitive function of poetry, he can, with considerable dialectical skill, establish a pluralism of truths—he can topple semantic positivism from its pedestal by showing that, like all conceptions of truth, it merely states a set of conditions in terms of which we are willing to assent. And however serviceable semantic positivism may be, if "truth" is only that which is empirically, publicly verifiable, the domain of truth to which we are willing to assent is appreciably narrowed. It seems to me that Mr. Wheelwright has done a genuine service in showing the reductiveness of semantic positivism: no one has so nicely and sharply distinguished the assumptions of literal and expressive language. But he is not content to stop with the different functions of the languages of science and poetry (as Kenneth Burke did in "Semantic and Poetic Meaning"); he would say with Whitman: "Hurrah for positive science! long live exact demonstration! / . . . facts are useful, and yet they are not my dwelling, / I but enter by them to an area of my dwelling."

The semantics of the laboratory stands in relation to Mr. Wheelwright's defense of poetic truth as naturalism once did to the new humanists' defense of man's ethical nature. Both Mr. Wheelwright and the humanists find the science they confront naive, both attempt to be true to human experience, and both would like to find a place for literature somewhere between science and religion, certainly nearer religion than science. But Mr. Wheelwright is not a Babbitt or a More; having come this far by his study of the literary object and by his discipline in logic, philosophy and anthropology, he is a better, because more sophisticated, defender of the human function of literature. He is never shrill and argumentative; he understands his opponent, and it is apparent in his analysis of literature that he has had the kind of literary experience he defends. What he finds in literature is the complexity and ambiguity of knowing and being—man in his human dilemma, still standing before the universe, not in certainty, but in the awareness of legitimate mystery. This is as far as he takes us in identifying poetry and religion (unless one cares to read his chapter on Eliot's *Four Quartets* harder than I do). He defines only a common stance. Mr. Wheelwright would give us the world in its freshness and immediacy, but he would not separate man and nature as the new humanists did in their desire to save the human. For the heart of Mr. Wheelwright's view is man's continuity with nature, his ways into an intimacy with it—he calls it "confrontational mutuality," a sympathetic responsiveness for which Buber's "I-thou" relationship seems the best description. Indeed, to go beyond the language of science to mythopoeic language is to demand again a language of man's participation in nature. This is the stirring impulse of his criticism. His interest in linguistic devices and complexity inevitably becomes a concern for the kind of world they help us participate in.

If such poetry is ultimately religious, it is only because it has its origin in the mythopoeic modes of imaginative perception. It is "religious" in so broad

a sense, that it can be construed only as "serious visioning." There is no clamor for orthodoxy here. There is only an analysis of two ways of apprehending the universe. One recognizes, however, in the "assertorial weight" of this analysis the question that Mr. Wheelwright is asking: Isn't this the kind of truth we ought to assent to? But whether or not one answers this question (and I do not think an affirmative answer need involve one in identifying contemporary poetry and religion), the book has its value as a *Summa* of the critical enterprise of the last quarter century. Mr. Wheelwright reexamines, always lucidly and carefully, the language of critical discourse: metaphor, symbol, myth, ritual, imagination, tension, archetype, etc. And he reviews critically the work of Richards, Tate, Chase, Foss, Coleridge, Cassirer, Goethe, Kant, Freud, Frazer, Fromm, Jung, Buber, Fergusson, and others. As an introduction to the language of poetic vision his work will undoubtedly become indispensable. And as a reminder that our perception of reality is limited by the language we use—by our linguistic resources—it may widen the contemporary vision and revitalize the roots of perception.

BABETTE DEUTSCH:

Twentieth Century Sense and Sensibility

EDITH SITWELL: *Collected Poems.* Vanguard.

W. H. AUDEN: *The Shield of Achilles.* Random House.

In his vision of the range of human types, from the completely subjective to the completely objective, William Butler Yeats, as is well known, saw men belonging to one or another segment of a great circle. The three types that closed the circle were "Hunchback, Saint and Fool." The Hunchback he spoke of as one "jealous of those who can still feel." The Fool, on the contrary, is "jealous of all that can act with intelligence and effect." The Saint's joy is "to permit the total life, expressed in humanity, to flow in upon him and express itself through his acts and thoughts." Whether or not one accepts Yeats's rather rigid categories, there is something persuasive about the way he pictures these types. Certainly there are those who resemble his Hunchback in approximating pure Mind, scarcely concerned with the body yet longing for emotional life, and others, like his Fool, who are close to pure Being, enjoying an almost animal responsiveness, happy in natural activity, yet, being human, with a hunger for purposive living; while a few, like his Saint, are capable of an inclusive and humane self-surrender. Neither Dame Edith Sitwell nor W. H. Auden is a saint, though the work of both suggests that they may be envious of those who achieve sainthood. Who would ever think of either as a hunchback or a fool! The difference in their performance, nevertheless, summons up the difference between Yeats's archetypes. Dame Edith's *Collected Poems* radiate the glow of a lavish sensuousness. She courts ecstasy and anguish. The play of her imagination is magnificent. But it is crossed by allusions that

smell vexingly of the lamp. In contrast, Auden's poetry, and his latest volume is no exception, is the work of an acutely attentive intellect, which appears to regard feeling as the naughty or suspect intruder. Dame Edith, as her delighted audience knows, can be witty. Auden has written lyrics of exquisite tenderness. Both, of course, are eminently skilful in exploiting the various resources of the language. But where the baroque splendors of Dame Edith's poetry address our senses (to her, as to Blake, significant as "the chief inlets of the soul"), the learned stanzas that Auden composes make their original appeal to our good sense. Contrast, for example, the way in which Dame Edith, in one of her more recent poems, "Gardeners and Astronomers," speaks of the earth with a passage from Auden's "Ode to Gaea." Her poem opens:

> Where the green airs seem fanning palms and the green psalms
> Of greater waters, where the orange hangs huge as Orion, and
> day-long great gauds and lauds of light
>
> Pierce their gold through the seeds, behold their secrets,
> And the weight of the warm air
> Shapes the exquisite corolla to a world of gold rain
> Closed in thick gold armor like a King's,
>
> Old men, dark-gold with earth and toil,
> Praise their green heavens . . .

It closes:

> And happy as the Sun, the gardeners
> See all miasmas from the human filth but as the dung
> In which to sow great flowers,
> Tall moons and mornings, seeds, and sires, and suns.

Auden's Ode, however classical its title and relatively formal its pattern, takes off, appropriately for a twentieth century composition, from a plane, thus:

> From this new culture of the air we finally see
> Far-shining in excellence, what our Mother, the
> Nicest daughter of Chaos, would
> Admire could she look in a glass,
>
> And what, in her eyes, is natural: it is the old
> Grand style of gesture we watch as, heavy with cold,
> The top-waters of all her
> Northern seas take their vernal plunge,
>
> And suddenly her desolations, salt as blood,
> Prolix yet terse, are glamorously carpeted
> With great swatches of plankton,
> Delicious spreads of nourishment,
>
> While, in her realm of solids, lively dots expand,
> Companionship becomes an unstaid passion and
> Leaves by the mile hide tons of
> Pied pebbles that will soon be birds.

But if Auden soars into the heights for his view of the earth, it is with no such exaltation as Dame Edith's that he comes to a halt. On the contrary, his Ode ends with an acknowledgment of earth's stubborn indifference to human aspirations:

> And Earth, till the end, will be herself; she has never been moved
> Except by Amphion, and orators have not improved
> Since misled Athens perished
> Upon Sicilian marble: what,
>
> To her, the real one, can our good landscapes be but lies,
> Those woods where tigers chum with deer and no root dies,
> That tideless bay where children
> Play bishop on a golden shore.

A more striking illustration of the gulf between the two poets is to be enjoyed by examining one of Edith Sitwell's poems on love, human or divine, after reading the couplets Auden builds upon Touchstone's remark that "The Truest Poetry Is the Most Feigning." His lines begin: "By all means sing of love, but, if you do,/Please make a rare old proper hullabaloo." After a number of observations *"Spass gesagt und ernst gemeint,"* the piece concludes:

> What but tall tales, the luck of verbal playing,
> Can trick [Man's] lying nature into saying
> That love, or truth in any serious sense,
> Like orthodoxy, is a reticence.

Both Auden and Dame Edith, being poets, delight in verbal play, but his fondness for it is far less apt than hers to loosen reticence.

The handsome volume which she calls *Collected Poems,* for all its amplitude, is incomplete. It does, however, present the major part of her work, including the most recent, a few early pieces not reprinted in previous collections, and two versions of "Metamorphosis." Indeed, the title of that poem might well be the title of the book. Poems previously placed in one group have been transferred to another. Thus, the lyric, "A Sylph's Song," placed here among the "Later Poems: 1940-1945," is to be found in her *Rustic Elegies,* published as early as 1927, where it was part of "Prelude to a Fairytale." The prefatory essay, "Some Notes on My Own Poetry," is likewise familiar as an exposition of the poet's experiments with abstract sounds, an appraisal of her own performance, and a statement of what she is endeavoring to do. The text has been slightly rearranged and augmented. But what chiefly gives one the impression of metamorphosis is the way in which certain phrases and images recur in poems of widely different significance, and the fact that occasionally a passage from an old poem will find itself happily at home in a new one. If this is somewhat distracting, it also gives a sense of continuity. What some readers might feel to be a limitation, others will rest in, as offering the pleasures of recognition. Alone those weary of pomp and sumptuousness will fail to respond to the grandeur of Dame Edith's references and the richness of her imagery. She plunders heavens and earth, history and mythology, poetry and

prose, as a child with a love for fantasy might ransack its mother's wardrobe, to apparel her verse in strange and gorgeous metaphors. There is wild extravagance here, but there is immense vitality, too. A few abstractions and some scraps of learning obtrude awkwardly, only to recede before an instance of pure lyricism, of rollicking fun, or of exultant vision. And the volume shows, more clearly than any previous collection of Edith Sitwell's work, her capacity for dealing with two pressing and difficult themes: the amoral exhaustion of our times and the acknowledgment of old age.

What Auden acknowledges in his ambitiously named book is middle age. There is a poem by Po Chü-I which declares:

> Between thirty and forty, one is distracted by the Five Lusts;
> Between seventy and eighty, one is a prey to a hundred diseases.
> But from fifty to sixty one is free from all ills;
>
> Calm and still—the heart enjoys rest.

What happens between forty and fifty he does not tell us, but Auden, not far from the state where "one is free from all ills," surveys the landscape, tells the canonical hours, and reflects, often tongue-in-cheek, on very disparate matters, such as railway travel, the fleet, politics, and art. His observations respecting Winds, Woods, Mountains, Lakes, Islands, Plains, and Streams are entertaining, knowledgeable and provocative, like good talk. They mix the language of common speech ("I know a retired dentist who only paints mountains") with the usual language of poetry ("Tall pomp of stone where goddesses lay sleeping"). They are as various in form as the subjects they present. But the reader is far more conscious of the activity of the poet's mind than of the aspects of land and water over which it plays like a rapid searchlight. Similarly, the "Horae Canonicae" refer to the personae of fairytales, the machinery of the modern State, the physical and psychological commonplaces of urban life today, rather in the voice of a brilliant dinner partner than in that of a religionist who happens to be a poet. They, too, show formal variety and the technical cleverness that one expects of their author. Possibly one holding to the poet's credo might have another view of them, but the reader who does not is apt to enjoy them without being reminded of the nature of religious experience. The title poem, which is placed with the miscellaneous pieces in Section II, is not the least memorable in this slender book. It contrasts the homely, happy, strenuous scenes of an ordered life that Thetis expects to see Hephaestus hammer out on her son's shield with the "artificial wilderness" under "a sky of lead" that we have learned to accept in the shape of the military camp, the concentration camp, and the ugly, loveless city. The contrast is emphasized by the shift from the lilting, lyrical stanzas about Thetis' anticipations to the dry iambics which tell what she saw forming under the lame forger's hands. It is not one of the most brilliant pieces in the collection, but it is one of those that engage the emotions as well as the mind.

To read Auden and Dame Edith at about the same time is to realize afresh that each is uniquely and greatly gifted, that they are as unlike in performance as any two living poets, and that, unhappily, they are not likely to learn from one another.

HERBERT GOLDSTONE:

Of Comedy and Tragedy

ELIZABETH HARDWICK: *The Simple Truth.* Harcourt, Brace.

OAKLEY HALL: *Mardios Beach.* Viking.

HARVEY SWADOS: *Out Went the Candle.* Viking.

In *The Simple Truth* Elizabeth Hardwick seems to be fashioning an American Tragedy of the 1950's in describing the trial of an Iowa university student accused of strangling his fiancée. Like Clyde Griffiths, Rudy Peck is an earnest poor boy and Betty Jane Henderson, his girl, comes from a wealthy family. However, there the similarity ends, for Miss Hardwick pays much less attention to Rudy than to the reactions of three key spectators who comment on the trial and over-interpret with a vengeance. Joe Parks is a would-be writer who believes he has tremendous powers of empathy and a capacity for fine, interesting reactions. He considers Rudy a victim of the unfair social system and therefore not really guilty. Doris, his wife, broods over abstract principles and tries to relate them to petty details of household management. If she can't, she simply ignores her domestic chores and concentrates on asking herself if she is living seriously all the time. Anita Mitchell is a faculty wife who is fascinated by "interesting" people and applies amateur psychoanalysis to their every motive. In so fastidiously expressing their ideas about the trial, these three seem like shepherds in pastoral comedy and the university an Arcadia. However, in the end the characters find themselves in the wood of error, since they become so lost in their complex analyses of the trial they cannot understand how the jury *simply acquits* Rudy.

What interests Miss Hardwick about her central characters and drives her to expose them and their ideas is that they are all intellectual snobs swollen with pride. Lost in speculation and absorbed in their own impressions, they cannot understand the trial as a human situation. When Joe explains Rudy's behavior to an unknown bar companion, the latter (who is Rudy's best friend) is so bewildered he rushes away. Blinded as they are, the three main characters lead empty lives without much feeling. Joe and Doris verbalize away their emotions, while Anita and her husband regard their home as a "special place, clean, silent, arousing condolence like a hospital."

In presenting her characters and their ideas, Miss Hardwick brilliantly utilizes her talent for crisp and controlled irony. She skillfully portrays Anita's highly romantic imagination at work on Rudy:

> Immediately, without waiting for the story's peculiar circumstances, those unsettling second thoughts, she saw him as a sacrificial animal, the fresh young lamb to be offered up for society's well-being. She could hardly think, without an ache of despair for mankind, of his abasement, his dangerous situation, which was that of a mythical youth who could turn neither to left nor right.

Despite such fine writing, the book is too thin. The preoccupation with comment becomes almost self-defeating, for nothing really happens, and, like Miss Hardwick's first novel, *The Ghostly Lover,* there is no narrative structure to speak of. Nor are the ideas themselves—the varieties of snobbish experience —given any bold interplay or development, so that once a character states his ideas and amplifies them, they become patently familiar and too easily ridiculed. In the end, Miss Hardwick's marvellous irony plays her false. Her characters' ideas are so exposed that the characters themselves stand out as lonely, pathetic human beings deserving of more understanding and warmth than the author can apparently give them. Here, as in *The Ghostly Lover,* characters remain static, and somehow the novel is over before it truly begins.

Oakley Hall's San Diego suburb, Mardios Beach, would seem poles apart from the academic groves of Iowa, yet it too has a pastoral flavor. On the surface Mardios Beach is a materialistic Arden filled with TV sets, ranch style houses, and flashy Buicks and Cads. But the glossy surface is just an illusion; underneath it is a seething jungle. Here the central characters are Bill Gregory, an aggressively successful used car dealer for whom sex and money are the end-all, and Keith Rankin, a clean-cut fraternity boy type, who has never questioned his or any one else's motives. When Keith discovers that his widowed mother, Hattie, has been Bill's mistress, and Bill realizes neither Keith's mother nor his wife cares for him, a chain reaction takes place in which Keith elopes and his mother has to give up her business, and Bill loses his wife to another man, and causes his son's death.

From this description, *Mardios Beach* may seem to be just a *tour de force* of sensationalistic incidents, but actually it is a grim, Hardyesque tragedy offering only a slight hope for amelioration. Sex and materialism are such dominant human drives that even those who see their limitations cannot escape them. In Hall's tragic world, choice seems to be an illusion, as Keith so profoundly discovers. In trying to overcome his disillusionment with his mother, Keith elopes with Mary Lynn Seibert, a very pretty and apparently sympathetic girl. However, she is as flagrantly materialistic as Bill and wants Keith only because she believes his mother is rich. With such limited choice, self-understanding, if it can come at all, brings little relief. Keith is appalled to recognize his own strong materialistic drive when he finds himself unable to give up his car after discovering that Bill had presented it to his mother. In attaching so much importance to his car, Keith sees he is not so much different from Bill, so that accepting himself also means symbolically accepting Bill as his father. Bill, on the other hand, cannot really understand what he has done and therefore accept his responsibility. He only learns he must, as Hattie points out, settle for his mistress with whom he can live on a strictly business basis. To mention Hattie is to realize, finally, the pervasive force of Hall's determinism, for, as strongly as Hattie comes to oppose Bill and his values, she cannot escape him. She gives him up because she sees how her relationship with him has spoiled her as a mother and a decent human being. But in renouncing Bill, she has to prepare to sell out her business to pay back money she owes him. Moreover, with Keith married to a girl like Mary Lynn, she has to work to

help him through school. At the end of the book Hattie stoically accepts her situation and genuinely can feel for others, but she does not seem too happy. The other strong opponent of Bill's materialism, Dick Bannerman, a moderately idealistic young builder, cannot escape Bill either, though he seems happier than Hattie. It is to Bannerman that Bill's wife, broken in spirit by her child's death, turns, and he willingly accepts her. Previously he could merely abstractly identify himself with suffering; now he has "one concrete tragedy to give himself to."

Hall's determinism in *Mardios Beach* is qualified by Hattie's vague stoicism and Bannerman's martyr-like compassion, both of which attitudes are not stated positively, but negatively in opposition to Bill. Limited as these alternatives are, they still represent a more mature vision of determinism than that in Hall's earlier novel, *Corpus of Joe Bailey,* where characters could see their lives only in terms of material and sexual success and failure. But there is a heavy price for such wisdom. All the characters, except Bill, who remembers some good times, seem to be gray and bleak and blatantly unromantic. Joe Bailey, for all his confused struggling to find his identity and all his defeats, has a zest for living, and even his blind and fruitless devotion to his adolescent love, Con Robertson, has some of the romantic wonder of Gatsby's love for Daisy. For these reasons, *Joe Bailey,* though cruder and conceptually simpler, is probably a better book, since it is livelier.

In technique, Hall uses his variant of the shifting point of view. He blocks out his action in sequences, in each of which one character has the central role, and it is through him that we see the scene and sense reactions. Our image of characters is a composite of them as they reveal themselves when they have the key role in a scene and when in other scenes they are subordinate figures. In each scene, the language and detail are designed to individualize the central character. Within each central character, Hall carefully restricts himself to only the most apparent mental processes, those immediately leading to action or speech. Consequently his characters live in a tangible, narrow world, and, like actors in a play, they move, think, and speak in a very definite space they block out for themselves.

Such a method heightens the drama, for each sequence directly involves action and conflict, and the sequences, without our realizing it, lead to the climactic moments. In addition, Hall can create vivid contrasts between characters or between the character as he seems to himself and to some one else. And within this naturalistic frame of reference, Hall makes the very things a character consistently does, or associates himself with, strong symbols of his personality. Bill's powerful black Cadillac, for example, ironically contrasts to its toy replica which his son is too weak to pedal. With individual characters, this shifting technique works best for those who are vigorous or forthright, like Bill, Hattie, and Mary Lynn, or, like Bannerman, who are inclined to self-dramatization. Hattie's clipped, incisive speech, her briskly assertive movements, and her quick, sharp reactions to others' feelings come out very strongly. Most effective of all is Bill, who bursts with furious energy, and monolithic aggressiveness, and even his doubt and bewilderment are violently physical. On the other hand, confused and complicated characters, like Bill's wife, Bea, and Keith, do not come to life. Bea's revulsion from Bill, her despair, and yet

pity for him come out only when she *tells* Bannerman she feels this way. Otherwise we would not know how she feels, or even if she feels at all. With Bea, the limitations of Hall's method are apparent, for very little of her character shows itself in such direct thought and action. Keith does not come into focus, because, for all his simplicity, he is deeply confused when he learns about his mother. Yet that confusion is never expressed, so that at the end his self-acceptance seems mechanical.

The failure of Bea and Keith to be sufficiently realized noticeably lessens the book's impact and blurs its vision. Were Bea able to evoke her past as a member of a distinguished society family, her present plight would, by contrast, be much more meaningful. With Keith, the failure is more important, for, placed strategically as he is, between Bill and Bannerman, and Hattie and Mary Lynn, he embodies in his own person the conflicting forces for good and evil on which the book turns. Were he more fully realized, the book would be more richly concrete in its vision. Yet, granting this limitation, *Mardios Beach* is a stark and austerely impressive novel.

For Harvey Swados, in his first novel, materialism also involves tragedy, as he chronicles the rise and fall of Herman Felton, a fascinatingly shrewd Jewish businessman, whom the war makes and crushes. In *Out Went the Candle,* however, Herman's grandiose, though destructive, efforts to assert himself and aid his family symbolize his materialism and are part of a larger theme, the gap between the generations which the war accentuates. Swados works out his theme by concentrating on Herman; his son, Morrow, in full revolt against him; his beautiful and brilliant daughter, Betsy, who is torn apart by the war and her reaction against her father; Bunty Traynor, a devilishly decadent proper Bostonian, who tries to seduce and blackmail Betsy; and Joe Burley, a young journalist whom Betsy meets in summer school. Except in the first part when Joe, Bunty, and Betsy are together in summer school, the book has no central dramatic focus and the characters go their separate ways. It is held together tenuously only by Joe himself, who becomes chorus and *deus ex machina* as he keeps meeting Herman and Morrow.

Unquestionably, the most interesting and powerful character is Herman. Before the war he was a moderately successful garment district manufacturer with dreams of grandeur out of proportion to his talents, and with a corny business philosophy cribbed from Arthur Brisbane and Roger Babson. But the war, with its opportunities for contract negotiation and finagling, converts his liabilities into major assets—at least for a while. What gives him tragic stature is the force of his ambivalent drives to assert himself and to help his family, whom he feels he must fiercely protect and constantly guide. Like Bill Gregory, he is driven to get back at the world and to prove himself, and his fantastic ambition and family devotion embody that need. He has no idea how little of the world he understands nor what awful damage he can do his children by the force of his example. Morrow rebels against his father's business methods and his power and consequently carries on this battle against army authority. Betsy, on the other hand, idolizes her father and completely accepts his view of the world. Finding it so blatantly false, she seems compelled to mortally wound her father.

Herman differs from Bill in that he genuinely loves his family and has much more self-insight, though it remains limited. He shows his love most strongly when he abandons his business empire at the precise moment he should be defending it to rush to London to save Morrow from court martial. During the voyage, he poignantly senses his failure as a father, and in a London air-raid shelter, huddled together with refugees, recognizes how he has been exploiting their misery for his war profits. Yet he can still envision himself as the great crusader daringly opposing a hostile world. To the end, the most impressive thing about Herman is the force of his ambivalent drives.

Of the others, Bunty stands out most vividly for his brazenly amoral cunning that far transcends Herman's. He seems as completely unaffected by any humane considerations as Machiavelli's princes, and he has a childish zest for enjoying his scheming. In her intrigues with Bunty and Joe, Betsy can be both incredibly naive about her father and Bunty, and yet unassumingly idealistic in her desire to *be* somebody. However, in the second half of the book she disintegrates too easily. Morrow seems too much to embody a type, the passionate idealist driven by hatred of his father. Joe at first is an ordinary, not too intelligent, opportunistic guy of decent instincts, who fascinates us because he can almost become a heel. Yet during the war he ripens into a mature, quietly perceptive, and responsible man. The change however does not occur before our eyes; he merely affirms it later, as he becomes a vehicle for the author's ideas.

The most basic of these ideas is that the war can brutally destroy and yet hopefully renew. It unleashes man's deepest and fiercest hatreds, and yet opens his heart to love and elemental human understanding. Stated so abstractly, these ideas seem platitudinous, and occasionally they become so when Joe overstates them out of character, but they take on the rich complexity of tragic insight as they are concretely embodied in Herman. In his own person, he hates so blindly and loves so passionately as to shatter his family and ruin himself, and yet out of the wreckage he may, through reconciliation with his family, redeem his humanity. And as an American Jew, exposed perhaps most openly to the conflicting drives of our materialist society, he symbolizes its terrible destructiveness and yet its misguided idealism.

As a whole, *Out Went the Candle* is terribly uneven in writing and disbalanced in structure. The language at times borders on passionate rant, the first part of the book is top-heavy in relation to the others, Joe and Betsy diminish into intellectual constructs, and the frame of the book, as Irving Howe points out, is not large enough to support Herman. All these are very real defects. But Swados has a genuine wit, a real talent for evoking places and events, an instinctive ability to breathe life into his characters, and an unabashed warmth of feeling for them. *Out Went the Candle* is not as finished or as powerful as *Mardios Beach,* but its world is bigger and its characters' potentialities greater. And, for a first novel, it certainly augurs well.

CONTRIBUTORS

FREDERICK BOCK has been appearing in ACCENT for over a decade. His work has also been printed in *Poetry,* the *Quarterly Review of Literature,* and other journals.

BABETTE DEUTSCH has published a score of volumes—novels, poetry, criticism, translation, and juveniles—, most recent of which is the critical survey, *Poetry in Our Time.*

SANFORD EDELSTEIN has had poetry published in several magazines. Some of his work is to be included in the first of a pamphlet series by New Ventures.

WALLACE FOWLIE, the well known scholar-critic of French literature, is back in Bennington, Vermont, after a period of research at the Newberry Library in Chicago.

HERBERT GOLDSTONE teaches English at Cornell University, and is one of the editors of *Epoch.*

JAMES B. HALL is presently teaching at the University of Oregon. His first novel, *Not by the Door,* came out recently.

VIOLA HOPKINS teaches English at Adelphi College, is working for her Ph.D. at New York University.

ROBERT HUTCHINSON, who lives in New York City, is expecting a volume of his poetry to be issued soon by Alan Swallow.

JASCHA KESSLER'S first published story appeared in the Summer 1952 issue of ACCENT. Now in New York, he is finishing a book on D. H. Lawrence.

JACK MATTHEWS is a previous contributor from Columbus, Ohio. Another of his stories is to be printed in the *Northern Review.*

SHERMAN PAUL, of the University of Illinois, is a frequent reviewer of books on American literature and culture. He is the author of *Emerson's Angle of Vision.*

RALPH ROBIN lives in Washington, D. C. He has contributed both fiction and verse to ACCENT.

RICHARD G. STERN is one of the newer fiction writers. His first published story (in the *Western Review)* was included in *Prize Stories 1954: the O. Henry Awards.*

ELEANOR ROSS TAYLOR lives in Gambier, Ohio. Her poetry has appeared in *Poetry, The Virginia Quarterly Review,* and *Botteghe Oscure.*

VERNON YOUNG is film critic for *Arts Digest* magazine in New York and also does free-lance writing.

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